



# A SOCIOLOGICAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH ANTI-EPIDEMIC SLOGANS

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## Abstract

From the perspective of sociolinguistics, based on the sample slogan corpus and with the help of the theory of social psychological rhetoric, this paper explores the external text features of the Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans through a detailed description of their rhetorical devices and at the same time, starting from the four social psychological functions of rhetoric, further explains the social psychological foundation behind rhetoric devices. The rhetorical similarities between the two types of slogans are that, based on their own language usage habits, they both adopt a variety of figures of speech to achieve the basic mobilization effect of slogans. While the difference lies in that in Chinese slogans, the figures of speech are more focused on realizing the power intention of slogans, and it is necessary to borrow the public power to ensure that the slogan can give full play to the maximum communication efficiency and executive effectiveness in a short time. English slogans, on the other hand, focus on the realization of the enlightenment intention. First ensure the audience's recognition of the slogan itself, and on this basis, further exert the effectiveness of slogans.

## Keywords

CPVID-19, Anti-Epidemic Slogans, Figure of Speech, Social Psychological Rhetoric

## Theoretical background of the research topic

This paper will mainly use Chen Rudong's Social Psychological Rhetoric Theory to analyze the effect of discourse construction and discourse understanding in verbal communication from the perspective of social psychology, and compare the covariant relationship between social psychological factors and rhetoric.

Anti-epidemic slogans, as a kind of special static verbal communication, connect the two main speech subjects, the slogan designer and the slogan receiver. In this connection process, the rhetoric at the surface level and the social psychological factors at the inner level both play an important regulating and dominating role.

The main task of social psychological rhetoric is to study how to exert the interpersonal adjustment function of language to promote social interaction and cooperation more effectively. Compared with ordinary speech acts, rhetoric acts have more definite purposes, more conscious use of rhetoric devices, more definite sentimental color of discourse, and pursue specific ideal communicative effects. The clearer the purpose of verbal communication is, the more formal the discourse will be, the stronger the appeal will be, and thus the more ideal rhetorical effect will be produced.

## Introduction

### Research background

Since the outbreak of the corona virus at the end of 2019, many slogans have appeared in China, some of which have not only gained good publicity and mobilization effect, but also attracted great attention online; At the same time, as the epidemic quickly evolved into a global public health emergency, a large number of anti-epidemic slogans appeared in other countries around the world. One of the decisive factors in the fight against COVID-19, as in all other global health campaigns, is reliance on mass media.<sup>1</sup> So, how do anti-epidemic slogans, which are essentially discourse, function in a particular region? What are the specific contents of anti-epidemic slogans? What

<sup>1</sup> Todd, G. (2007). *Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left*. (Z.R. Hu, & R. Zhang, Trans). Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House.

are the sociolinguistic features of Chinese slogans and English slogans, and are there any similarities and differences? These questions prompted the author to choose the Chinese and English slogans during the COVID-19 pandemic as the topic and object of the paper.

### Theoretical framework

Slogan is a kind of mass media with a long history, and the realization of its function mainly depends on the communication of specific rhetoric in the slogan text and the establishment of consciousness and psychological identity in the group scope.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this paper will mainly use Chen Rudong's Social Psychological Rhetoric Theory to analyze the effect of discourse construction and discourse understanding in verbal communication from the perspective of social psychology, and compare the covariant relationship between social psychological factors and rhetoric. From the perspective of social psychological rhetoric, rhetoric has four functions: information function, emotion function, control function and interpersonal function, and the subject of verbal communication consciously and purposefully achieves the desired communicative effect through rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> Anti-epidemic slogans, as a kind of special static verbal communication, connect the two main speech subjects, the slogan designer and the slogan receiver. In this connection process, the rhetoric at the surface level and the social psychological factors at the inner level both play an important regulating and dominating role.

The main task of social psychological rhetoric is to study how to exert the interpersonal adjustment function of language to promote social interaction and cooperation more effectively. Compared with ordinary speech acts, rhetoric acts have more definite purposes, more conscious use of rhetoric devices, more definite sentimental color of discourse, and pursue specific ideal communicative effects. The clearer the purpose of verbal communication is, the more formal the discourse will be, the stronger the appeal will be, and thus the more ideal rhetorical effect will be produced.

### Research method and questions

This paper mainly adopts quantitative & qualitative method and descriptive interpretation method. A total of 110 anti-epidemic slogans (55 in Chinese and 55 in English) were collected from Chinese and American slogan websites and social media ([www.kouhao.org](http://www.kouhao.org) / <https://slogan.company>), all of which existed in real life or were voted by netizens. Based on the sample corpus, the research questions are as follows:

- What are the characteristics of anti-epidemic slogans and what are the differences between them with other ordinary slogans?
- How did the rhetoric in the Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans get constructed and function?
- What are the similarities and differences between Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans in terms of language, cultural cognition and social communication?

### The Rhetorical Characteristics of CN and EN Anti-Epidemic Slogans

As a specific speech act, anti-epidemic slogan is the discourse after certain "artistic processing", which is most obviously reflected in its rhetoric. Therefore, if exploring the rhetorical features of Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans, first the similarities and differences in the use of figures of speech between the two need to be compared.

Based on the collected corpus, firstly, all slogans using figures of speech are screened out, and the figures of speech used in each slogan are determined. If two or more figures of speech appear in one slogan, the figure of speech with stronger relevance, more discernible and more impressive is selected. After screening, classification and summary, the following data are attached:

Figures of speech	metaphor	rhyme	personification	antithesis	repetition	parody	pun	irony
CN slogans	27	13	5	3	3	4	0	0
EN slogans	17	14	7	6	4	0	3	3

Table 1: Figures of speech distribution

In general, metaphor occupy the highest proportion in the two kinds of slogans, followed by rhyme. Personification, antithesis and repetition appear in both Chinese and English slogans with little difference in proportion. In addition, parody is unique in Chinese anti-epidemic slogans, while pun and irony are unique in English. In the following part, according to the basic classification and comparison, the top two metaphor and

<sup>2</sup> R. Denton. (1980). The Rhetorical Functions of Slogans: Classifications and Characteristic. *Communication Quarterly* (28), 10-18.

<sup>3</sup> D.C. Wang, & R.D. Chen. (1995). Qianlun shehui xinli xiucixue [On the social psychological rhetoric]. *Journal of Foreign Languages* (5), 11-16..

rhyme in proportion will be analyzed in detail, as well as how the unique figures of speech of the two kinds of slogans are constructed and play a rhetorical function.

### **Metaphor**

Just like Aristotle said, "Metaphor is something a poet is born with." It is a usual but expressive figure of speech in our writing and speaking.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, the number of words in slogan has seriously limited. And it is required the slogan demonstrates in deep meaning with such limited words. In this way, metaphor can help to solve this language problem. That is one reason why it accounts for the biggest proportion of figures of speech of both the CN and EN anti-epidemic slogans. On the other hand, the human mind is also metaphorical. Richards believes that metaphors abound in everyday discourse<sup>5</sup>. As COVID-19 is a sudden major public health event, people's understanding of it is limited in a short period of time. Therefore, in anti-epidemic slogans, slogan creators deliberately choose another thing to talk about it on the basis of existing or creating similar things, so as to pursue better language expression and communication effect.

[Example01 in CN] 坚决打好打赢疫情防控阻击战。

[Example02 in CN] 用各级党员干部和医护人员的辛苦付出换来广大人民群众的幸福安宁。

[Example03 in CN] 疫情防控就是政治大考，党员一线提交合格答卷。

The three slogans here all contain obvious metaphor. Example 01 is a war metaphor, comparing epidemic prevention and control to a battle ("防控阻击战"), and doing a good job in epidemic prevention and control means winning the battle. In this framework of war metaphor, the characteristics of rapid spread, wide coverage, suffering and casualties of the epidemic establish a similar relationship with war. Example 02 is a transaction metaphor, in which the efforts of CPC members and medical staff are exchanged for the safety and wellbeing of the Chinese people, and a metaphorical image of a transaction steelyard is established, which highlights the belief of the CPC in serving Chinese people and the cognition that collective interests are higher than individual interests. Example 03 uses educational metaphor, comparing epidemic prevention and control work to an exam and CPC members to examinees. Based on the experience and cognition of the exam, the slogan receivers can associate the problems in the exam and map them to obstacles and difficulties in epidemic prevention and control, and the final effectiveness of the party members' anti-epidemic work will also be marked and scored. In this way, the political test("政治大考") in the original domain is successfully mapped to the qualified answer paper("合格答卷") in the target domain and completes the construction of metaphor.

[Example01 in EN] Be a Corona fighter.

[Example02 in EN] Coronavirus season ahead.

[Example03 in EN] 6 feet apart, please.

In English anti-epidemic slogans, metaphors also occupy the largest proportion of the figures of speech. In Example 01, the slogan receivers are encouraged to be Corona virus fighters, which implies a framework of war metaphor. Virus is a war, and the public needs to fight for the safety of life. Example 02 uses a metaphor of competition, "season" here is a typical western concept, and compares the upcoming epidemic stage to a sporting event on the new season, highlighting the overwhelming trend of the epidemic and unpredictable challenges under the epidemic environment, also to a certain extent, inspiring the slogan receivers' desire to survive (win) in the epidemic competition. Example 03 is a metaphor of ontology. In English, the word "feet" as a unit of length, its itself is the image with intuitive knowledge of our body to understand the abstract length concept, and 6 feet in the English language concept often used to refer to the height of an ordinary adult male, so this ontological metaphor used here to warn people about the need to keep more than one person at a safe distance in public.

### **Rhyme**

Rhyme, as a figure of speech, refers to the identity or similarity in the sounds of word, employed usually at the ends of lines in order to please the ear and to assist in the construction of a poem. To some extent, slogans are similar to poems in form, so rhyme is the second most common figure of speech in Both Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans.

[Example01 in CN] 疫情肆虐需警惕，防范措施要牢记。

[Example02 in CN] 亲戚不走·明年还有；朋友不聚·回头再续。

<sup>4</sup> Hawks, T. (1992). On Metaphor. (B.Z. Gao, Trans). Beijing: Kunlun Publishing House.

<sup>5</sup> I. A. Richards. (1936). The Philosophy of Rhetoric. New York: Oxford University Press.

The two typical rhyme slogans here as well as the other 11 CN rhyme slogans are all applied end rhyme. This phenomenon is not hard to understand, because in Chinese, whether it is poetry, couplets or slogan text, the most common and most impressive rhyme is the end rhyme. While in English anti-epidemic slogans, things are different. There did exist more varieties of rhyme.

[Example01 in EN] Cover your cough!

[Example02 in EN] Netflix and chill is better any time over coronavirus and be killed.

[Example03 in EN] Wear protection to prevent infection.

The three examples respectively represent the head rhyme(alliteration), internal rhyme and end rhyme. In example 01, the pronunciation /k/ in cover and cough is rhymed in head syllables and better warns people to cover the nose and mouth when coughing; in example 02, the Netflix & coronavirus and chill &killed are two groups of internal rhyme, and its purpose is to persuade people to stay at home as soon as possible; in example 03, the common pronunciation /ʃn / in protection and infection is rhymed in end syllables, also trying to arouse people's attention to take protective measures like wearing a mask and gloves to avoid getting infected.

### **Parody**

Parody is defined by Owen Watson as “an imitation of the characteristic style of a writer, composer, etc. or of a literary, artistic or musical work”. In other words, parody is a kind of figure of words relationship. As a unique figure of speech in Chinese anti-epidemic slogans, parody can shorten the cognitive distance with the slogan receivers more quickly, and it is easier to obtain the recognition and even love of them.

[Example01 in CN] 见屏如面 · 网络拜年也是团圆！

[Example02 in CN] 预防千万条 · 口罩第一条！

In example 01, the wording “见屏如面” is imitated the traditional expression “见字如面” in correspondence, which means seeing the online blessing messages or videos are functionally equivalent to the face-to-face New Year's visit by replacing the Chinese character “字”(letters) with “屏”(screens). And in the example 02, the whole line is a parody of a famous subtitle “道路千万条，安全第一条”(Routes are countless. Safety is foremost) from the movie *The Wandering Earth*. Here it replaced “道路”(routes) with “预防”(preventive measures) and “安全”(safety) with “口罩”(mask) aims to emphasize the importance of masks in epidemic prevention measures, and at the same time, to make slogan receivers connect the severity of the current epidemic with the critical survival situation of the earth in the movie, so as to alert and persuade people.

### **Pun and irony**

Pun, also termed as paronomasia, is a play on words, or rather a play on the form and meaning of words, so that one utterance brings to mind two sound-alikes or two incongruous meaning of the same word. Or it is the amusing use of a word or a phrase with more than one meaning of two words or two phrases which sound the same in such a way that both meanings are brought to mind.

[Example01 in EN] 2020 Corona, not just a beer.

[Example02 in EN] Keep clean to clean coronavirus.

Example 01 is obviously the first case in the above definition of pun. The word “Corona” is no longer a beer brand after the outbreak of COVID-19. It also means coronavirus, and reminds people not to underestimate the damage of the virus by using the pun. In example 02, the same word "clean" appears twice in the slogan, but it is clear that both words have different parts of speech and meanings. The first word "clean" is an adjective predicate meaning clean and hygienic, and the second word "clean" is a verb meaning to get rid of. The word "clean" is used to emphasize the importance of good hygiene in preventing the COVID-19.

Irony, according to Arthur Zeiger, is the dry mock, in which the content and intent of the words employed are opposite; that is, the contrary of what is said to be understood. It is a device of speaking or writing in which the meaning literally expressed is the opposite of the meaning intended and which aims at ridicule, humor or sarcasm.

[Example01 in EN] The spread of coronavirus ends with you.

[Example02 in EN] Struggling to stay indoors? Try shaving off your eyebrows.

In example 01, the slogan literally means that the spread of the epidemic stops at you, if we take this

literally, each see the slogan is the last person to be infected with the coronavirus, then it would be horrible, but if we see take this as an irony, we will be able to understand the real meaning of this slogan is to encourage everyone completes the protective measures, and do not give the chance to the spread of the virus. In example 02, the literal meaning is to scrape off eyebrows to kill the time when stay at home, but clearly this is an irony, it is not intended to encourage everyone to really go to shave eyebrows, but want to use the humorous way, in turn, emphasize even stay at home is boring, people should also find something to do to avoid going out as much as possible.

### The Sociolinguistic Characteristics of CN and EN Anti-Epidemic Slogans

For language users, it is of limited value to only explore the use of words, sentences and figures of speech without understanding the characteristics of speech acts.<sup>6</sup> And for emergency slogans such as anti-epidemic slogans, in addition to being creative or tailored in rhetoric, publishers also need to explore the psychological world of the audience so that the slogans can give full play to their pragmatic value. Focus on clarifying the physical, psychological and social worlds of the audience so that the audience will have less reasoning effort in understanding the slogan.<sup>7</sup>

First of all, six topics are drawn up based on the actual content of all the sample slogans to highlight the cultural value orientation behind the slogan text. Similarly, if there are two or more topics in a slogan, the more relevant, recognizable and impressive topic is chosen. After screening, classification and summary, the following data are obtained:

Topic	Topic definitions	Coding rules-keywords capture	Numbers	
			CN	EN
Illness	As a disease, coronavirus is highly contagious and poses a great threat to life	coronavirus, kill, death, spread, breath, etc.	1	10
Family	A reminder, persuasion, or warning involving kinship or geographical relations	the elders, family, parents, kinship, village, community, etc.	5	3
Culture	An expression involving traditional culture, allusions, religious elements, or with strong cultural symbols	Jesus, Corona, supernatural being, New Year's visit, etc.	7	14
Morality	A moral requirement or constraint, the relationship between the individual and others, society, even the state	united, fight against, war, responsibility, obligation, enemy, etc.	30	16
Science	A suggestion on epidemic prevention measures, informative and educational, weak sentimental colors	wash, wear, cover, soap, clean, keep away, mask, go out, disinfect, etc.	6	8
Emotion	A positive expression of emotion, wordings with kind comfort and gentle encouragement	don't worry, mercy, love, warmth, we, together, safe, etc.	6	4

Table 2: Topics distribution coding table

It can be seen from the table, all the CN and EN anti-epidemic slogans collected can be included in the six topics, but their emphasis is different. Morality occupies an absolute proportion in Chinese slogans, and although there are other topics, the number is relatively small. On the whole, the discourse features are obvious, mainly focusing on the prohibition of visiting relatives and friends and mass prevention and control of the epidemic. In English slogans, although moral concept is also the topic with the largest number, the number of other themes is also relatively equal, especially in the two topics involving illness and culture, English slogans are significantly more than Chinese slogans.

In the framework of social psychological rhetoric, rhetoric, as an organized verbal communication of human beings, has four social psychological functions: information, emotion, control and interpersonal. And through the classification of the implied topics in slogans, we can see that the presentation of topics is actually achieved through the external figure of speech and internal implicit rhetoric functions of slogans.

First, the information function. The process of discourse communication is actually based on information transmission. One of the purposes of rhetoric is to make speech information correct, appropriate and effective. In terms of figure of speech, Chinese slogans are accustomed to using neat poet forms and rhyme (especially the end rhyme), which give the audience a deeper impression in terms of vision and hearing respectively. English slogans

<sup>6</sup> F.Z.Hu. (2002). Tufa weiji guanli de yige yuyongxue fenxi [A Pragmatic Analysis of the Management of Emergent Crisis—A Concurrent Study of Research Horizons of Linguistics and Rhetoric]. Journal of East China Normal University (6), 51-57

<sup>7</sup> Y. Bai, & D.X. Wu. (2015). Tufa shijian biaoYu kouhao de jiangou moshi tanjiu [On the Research of the Construction Mode about Emergence Slogans]. Journal of Xiangtan University (3), 155-160

are more likely to use puns and antithesis to convey information to the audience through some creative designs. At the thematic level, the information function of slogan rhetoric mainly focuses on the two major topics, illness and science. There are few illness-related topics in Chinese slogans compared with English slogans. On the one hand, English slogans do not avoid negative information (such as death and demons), instead, they encourage direct and truthful expression. On the other hand, introducing or portraying the disease itself in slogans is not as efficient as directly informing prevention and treatment measures. Therefore, it can be seen that English slogans are more focused on the causal logic of epidemic prevention and control, while Chinese slogans are more focused on the explicit results of epidemic prevention and control.

Second, the emotion function. This is a very important function of rhetoric. In addition to the object information, there are also considerable emotional elements in anti-epidemic slogans, which to a large extent have the nature of persuading, influencing or changing the emotion, attitude and behavior of communicative objects. In fact, the similarity of the two kinds of slogans on the figures of speech is the use of personification, for example, the epidemic is compared to a ruthless killer, emphasizing that the virus has the ability to walk away or visit people's home or to give power to masks and soap, reflecting the use of obvious emotional colors towards different things, like the COVID-19 represents bad, so it needs to fight against the epidemic; The quarantine measures are good, so we need to adopt them, not ignore them. In terms of topic distribution, the emotion function mainly corresponds to the topic of emotion. For instance, the first-person plural is displayed in imperative sentences, and the positive emotional bond is established by wordings in casual style and intimate style. Thus, the emotion function of slogan can be realized in the emotional output of rhetoric subject and the emotional identification of receivers.

Third, the control function. People interact socially through rhetoric, which means the inevitable behavior controlling among each other. In social life, people's social behavior tends to be orderly, and speech control is an important means to realize the social order. Anti-epidemic slogans mostly exist with the approval of public authorities. Modern governments or managers display "the authority of policies, the right to manage society and the control of public opinion" through slogans. In anti-epidemic slogans, metaphor with the highest proportion can effectively set up the control framework through the correspondence of mapping relations in metaphors, such as war metaphor, exam metaphor and competition metaphor. While on the topic distribution, control function mainly reflects in the family and morality. On the one hand, compared the outbreak to the war, the killer, the devil, or other image, let the audience unconsciously stands firmly in the opposite of the virus. On the other hand, through the basic emotions of family affection, blood relationship and intimate relationship, persuade, warn and even condemn the public from a negative perspective, so that the public have a kind of cognition, that is, it is immoral to violate the ban. The difference is that in Chinese slogans, specific atmosphere is used to reinforce group identity and dilute individual characteristics, such as emphasizing party members, soldiers and doctors, while in English slogans, citizens' interests and competitive mentality are emphasized, such as one's own infection cannot infect others.

Last, the interpersonal function. Rhetoric is a communicative activity used to regulate social behavior. Only in this way can rhetorical communication clearly show that it is practical. The goal is to influence people's choices about specific issues that need to be addressed urgently.<sup>8</sup> According to Allen Bell's concept of audience design, it is the speaker's responsibility to determine his audience type and then design his discourse accordingly. In the anti-epidemic slogan, this concept is clearly reflected. In terms of figure of speech, Chinese slogans use parody, while English slogans use pun and irony. On the topic of culture, the two types of slogans are creatively designed based on the unique phenomena or fixed expressions in their respective language and culture. This kind of design is based on the judgment and presupposition of the speaker (slogan designer) on the cognitive characteristics and reception habits of the specific audience (slogan receiver). For example, the following two pictures show the speaker's consideration of design intention. Figure 1 is a rural slogan banner in China, used the rhyme as figure of



Figure 1: A slogan in Chinese rural area



Figure 2: A slogan in Australia

<sup>8</sup> G, Hauser. (1986). Introduction to Rhetorical Theory. New York: Harper & Row Publisher.

speech, on the topic can be classified as culture. Here the expression “the immortal” (神仙) is obviously a consideration of the potential superstitious thoughts of rural residents. Compared with the straightforward and empty epidemic prevention measures slogan, this expression is slightly exaggerated, but it is humorous and persuasive; And figure 2 is clearly a slogan in Australia, with the combination of words, numbers, and picture left the audience a deep impression, at the same time, the kangaroo element in the picture also makes full use of the collective unconsciousness of Australians at the cultural level. The image of the kangaroo is easier to be remembered by the public than the number description of 1.5 meters, so that the preventive measures of keeping a safe distance can be implemented more efficiently.

### Conclusion

As a way of presenting facts, opinions and emotions, slogans have a strong social informing and mobilizing effect. The anti-epidemic slogans during the COVID-19 pandemic, as slogans with strong era characteristics under the background of public health emergencies, have different rhetorical devices and cultural value orientations in different language contexts. Through the above text analysis and comparison of the Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans, it can be seen that the rhetorical similarities between the two types of slogans are that, based on their own language usage habits, they both adopt a variety of figures of speech to achieve the basic mobilization effect of slogans. While the difference lies in that in Chinese slogans, the figures of speech are more focused on realizing the power intention of slogans, and it is necessary to borrow the public power to ensure that the slogan can give full play to the maximum communication efficiency and executive effectiveness in a short time. English slogans, on the other hand, focus on the realization of the enlightenment intention. First ensure the audience's recognition of the slogan itself, and on this basis, further exert the effectiveness of slogans.

In terms of the social psychological level of slogan rhetoric, it can be seen from the analysis of content and topic that in terms of cultural value orientation, the similarity between the two types of slogans is the value appeal about “life first” based on emotion function, as well as the high recognition of domestic culture based on interpersonal function. However, the differences are that the integrity of family and country, the moral habit of human etiquette and the implicit collectivism in Chinese slogans highlight the control function of rhetoric. While the English slogan emphasizes causality, rational thinking and individualism, which highlights the information function of rhetoric. At the same time, it should also be noted that there are some improper linguistic phenomena such as vulgar words and symbolic violence in both Chinese and English anti-epidemic slogans. Therefore, in the future, slogan designers need to further standardize the rhetoric of slogans to better realize the communication between managers and the public in the public domain.

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