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A Tentative Classification of Rhetoric in Japanese Linguistic Expressions in Advertising Contexts

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Abstract: This paper studies rhetoric used in Japanese linguistic expressions in advertising contexts. Using actual expressions that appeared in advertisements which were granted Grand Prix and 2nd Grand Prix awards for creative advertisements in newspapers, it was found that most advertisements have various kinds of rhetoric and that a few incorporated loanwords.

Introduction

Today, various kinds of rhetoric are used in linguistic expressions in a variety of situations. Especially in advertising contexts, advertisers seek to raise awareness of their firm or commodities. Therefore, they have a tendency to use a lot of rhetoric in their advertisement so as to draw more attention from their future customers. Then, if there is a classification about rhetoric by way of similarity of its usage, it is useful for advertisers, firms or individuals to analyze the effect of using rhetoric in their advertisement and decide how they express their appeal points.

A taxonomy about rhetoric in English linguistic expressions in advertising context was put forth by McQuarrie and Mick (1996). The taxonomy is divided into two modes which consist of scheme, which shows excess regularity, and trope, which shows irregularity. Each mode is divided into two categories. Scheme consists of repetition and reversal, and trope consists of substitution and destabilization.

However, in searching existing articles, it is unclear whether there are any classifications of rhetoric in Japanese linguistic expressions, especially in advertising contexts. Then, if proper classification is not found, making a new classification system by analyzing existing advertisements might be helpful. This paper tried to establish a tentative classification while exploring the advertising world in Japan.

To begin with, do you know the Yomiuri Advertising Awards? Those are major awards for creative advertisements in newspapers. In June 2015 the 31st award ceremony was held for advertisements in 2014 by Yomiuri, which is a Japanese major newspaper company. Then do you know who won the Grand Prix in the advertiser section of this award? Shown in Figure 1 is the Grand Prix of 31st award.

Softbank, which is a Japanese major mobile-phone company, won the Grand Prix by using the photo with the phrase, “Taking a photograph with the iPhone6.” This is an advertisement composed of a picture taken with an iPhone 6 with a few words. Generally speaking, advertisements on newspapers might be thought to consist of many words. Actually, most advertisements that received this award consist of pictures or drawings with a few words. It is a certain finding of this exploration, and interesting. In this way, it is clear that Japanese advertisements in newspapers tend to have some linguistic expressions to be classified.

Then what to classify? Because commercial message on TV or radio might not have linguistic expressions, the author decided to focus on advertisements on newspapers which must consist of some words and selected, as an object of this exploration, the Grands Prix and the second prizes at the Yomiuri Advertising Award in the past five years. But if the advertisement has no words, it is excluded. And as a prior condition of the analysis, there are two more premises. One is that if there are several advertisement related to the same firm as the Grands Prix or the second prizes, the initially listed advertisement is selected as objects. The other is that if there are several sentences in the advertisements, the biggest words are selected as objects. But if the biggest words are formed with the firm’s name, object is shifted to the second biggest words.

Next is how to classify. The author devised a method (Table 1) by reference to existing articles. The columns are based on McQuarrie and Mick (1996), and the rows are derived from Piller (2003). The columns consists of four elements which show some kinds of rhetoric. Repetition [反復], which includes rhyme, anaphora, and other elements, means to use words, which sometimes have similar pronunciation, in the same sentences repeatedly. Reversal [倒置], which includes antimetabole, antithesis or similar, means to change the order of words reversely. Substitution [強調], which includes hyperbole, ellipsis or similar, means to emphasize by addition of unnecessary words or lack of necessary words. Destabilization [比喻], which includes metaphor, pun or similar, means to destabilize regular words to attract attention by using different meaning of the words or giving different meaning to the words. And the row is divided into two categories based on whether or not loanwords are used in the sentence of advertisements. Finally, if rhetoric is not used in the advertisement, it is not classified in any category written in the table but is classified in a category without rhetoric as “C”. Next, let us peruse some examples.

The first example is already introduced in the opening part as a Grand Prix in 2014 by Softbank with the words “Taking a picture with the iPhone6.” There is no rhetoric in this simple phrase, which is the reason why this is in category C. A second example is 2nd prize in 2011 by TAKASHIMAYA which is a big department store (Figure 2).

This picture shows the appearance of Takashimaya eighty years ago. With this picture there is a phrase, “Who would have imagined?” Ordinary Japanese people can understand what this advertisement wants to say, but actually this sentence lacked an object, which means “imagined what?” Hence, this sentence is categorized A3, which is substitution for emphasis by absence of objective.

The third example was awarded 2nd prize in 2013 by JR East, which is a Japanese train company. The phrase in this advertisement is “We can’t meet by mail. Let’s meet by rail” (See Figure 3). This is apparently rhyme, and it means this is rhetoric as repetition. And in this phrase mail and rail are loanwords into Japanese, so this is easy to classify as B1.

The next example received 2nd prize in 2012 from POLA, which is a cosmetics company (Figure
Figure 2. Who would have imagined?

Figure 3. We can’t meet by mail.
Let’s meet by rail.
The phrase used in this advertisement is “Where in Japan is the prefecture with the most beautiful skin?” Because of course a prefecture is not a human being and doesn’t have skin, this sentence is an anthropomorphic metaphor. Moreover, there are no loanwords, so this is classified as A4.

Next is the final example. It is by the Takarajima magazine company (Figure 5): “Can dogs from Japan and dogs from United States talk to each other?” It is unclear what they want to appeal. However, this seems, in some vague way, catchy, because there are several conceivable questions before this specific question. For instance, “Do the dogs need translation?” “Can the dog talk with human language?” or “Which is a Japanese dog?” Anyway, ordinary Japanese people seem to conceive of various questions and then are fascinated and attracted by this expression. At any rate, with no loanwords this is judged as A4.

For this paper in total, fifteen examples awarded the Grand Prix or second prize in the past five years were classified. The remaining examples are attached at the end of this paper in a partial appendix (the complete appendix is available online). The results of the classification are shown in Table 2.

From this table we can learn that there are various kinds of rhetorical expressions in Japanese advertising contexts. Only two out of 15 advertisements use no rhetoric. This means that most advertisers tend to use rhetoric in their advertisement to draw the attention of their future customers. We can learn, too, that most advertising words consist of Japanese vocabulary or characters and loanwords are used only a few times. It is unsure why loanwords are not used frequently in the contemporary Japanese community, but it might be probable that the target people of newspapers tend to be older and thus not so accustomed to loanwords.

Finally, the author focused on the words of linguistic expressions in the advertisement on newspapers, but the effect of advertisement depends on the total appeal power, including images or explanations. Thus, this point should be explored further.
Table 3. Classification Scheme with Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical Content</th>
<th>Repetition</th>
<th>Reversal</th>
<th>Substitution</th>
<th>Destabilization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Japanese</td>
<td>A1 = 2</td>
<td>A2 = 1</td>
<td>A3 = 1</td>
<td>A4 = 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including loanwords</td>
<td>B1 = 1</td>
<td>B2 = 0</td>
<td>B3 = 1</td>
<td>B4 = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Substitution can also be glossed as 過剰 or 欠落. The C category (advertisements with only images and no prose) had two responses.

References


*Editor’s note:* Following is a partial appendix. Interested readers can view the complete index online at http://www.otbforum.net/publications

### Appendix

*(partial)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Company / Type</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Cat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Prix</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2nd Prize</td>
<td>Softbank (mobile phones)</td>
<td>Taking a picture with the iPhone6</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2nd Prize</td>
<td>Air France (airline)</td>
<td>Why not meet in Paris?</td>
<td>A4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2nd Prize</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton (luxury bags)</td>
<td>Louis Vuitton and Christian Louboutin celebrate the LV monogram</td>
<td>B4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Cat. = category.