



# Intercultural Isotopy Analysis of the German and Chinese BMW Advertisement

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**Abstract.** This research investigates the comparison between German and Chinese BMW advertisements, employing the isotopy analysis method within the framework of textlinguistics. The result revealed a shared characteristic in both German and Chinese automobile advertisements, namely the strategic selection of some isotopys, such as brand names and functionalities. Moreover, we noticed differences in the themes of these ads, with Chinese ads focusing on specialization and interior aspects, while German ads emphasize technological expertise and design elements. This difference can be attributed to that ad writers want to align with their respective cultural contexts, thereby enhancing the marketing effectiveness.

**Keywords:** textlinguistics; intercultural analysis; isotopy; advertisement.

## 1 Introduction

Advertising is culturally shaped. The language-specific cultures or national styles recognizable in the text are unwritten conventions of the text constitution that ultimately allow the individual to act correctly and pragmatically within a language community [1]. Advertising must adopt the respective culture-specific system of interpretation if it is to be successful [2]. Nowadays, many products are marketed both in Germany and in China. For example - cars. Car advertising can be seen as a reflection of society. But the same products could have different descriptions. The reasons might be that Germany and China have completely different languages and cultures.

Advertising is deeply influenced by culture. The distinct cultural characteristics, that can be recognized in the text, are implicit conventions of text construction, and they enable individuals to perform correctly and pragmatically within a language community [1]. Advertising must therefore incorporate the respective culture-specific system of interpretation if it wants to be successful. [2]. The German automobile industry is very developed, and several German car brands have attained significant popularity within the Chinese market. Automobile advertisements can be seen as a reflection of society. However, these identical products could be described differently. This variance might stem from the stark contrasts in languages and cultures between Germany and China.

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In this paper, I aim to perform a contrastive analysis of texts in German and Chinese automobile advertisements, specifically focusing on BMW 5 Series cars as examples, using the framework of isotopic levels in textlinguistics.

The text is understood as a unit containing the most important elements of the dominant isotopic levels [3]. In the linguistic approach, according to Greimas [4], isotopy is the text-constitutive context of the meaning of successive words (or other units) based on common semantic features. Each recurrent linguistic unit within the text can be identified as one of the “isotopy levels”. An isotopy level therefore includes all expressions that have a common semantic feature [5]. For example, in the sentence “I eat some fruits”, the words “eat” and “fruits” both share a seme (related to food), contributing to the coherence of the sentence and exhibiting one isotopy level “food”. The isotopy theory is used for analyses to explain the difference between German and Chinese advertisements in more detail in the following section.

## 2 Isotopy Analysis of the German and Chinese Bmw Advertisements

In this section, an intercultural isotopy analysis of the German and Chinese BMW advertisements from 2013 will be conducted, with a focus on the BMW 5 Series Limousine. Firstly, text elements from the German and Chinese BMW 5 Series car advertisements that share common semantic features will be exacted. After that, the meaning connections will be summarized and finally presented in the table.

### **BMW German advertisement\*:**

*FAHREN-WIE-NIE-ZUVOR.DE*

*Ausdrucksstark, dynamisch und effizient - die neue BMW 5er Limousine beeindruckt mit stilvollem Design und zukunftsweisenden Technologien. Zahlreiche auf Wunsch erhältliche Ausstattungen wie Online Entertainment, die innovative Diktierfunktion oder das vollfarbige BMW Head-Up Display machen das Fahren noch sicherer und komfortabler. Erleben Sie diese und viele weitere BMW ConnectedDrive Technologien für intelligente Vernetzung und mehr Fahrfreude jetzt in der neuen BMW 5er Reihe bei Ihrem BMW Partner oder unter [www.bmw.de/5erLimousine](http://www.bmw.de/5erLimousine).*

*Die Neue BMW 5er Limousine.*

*BMW ConnectedDrive Vernetzt mit Ihrer Welt.*

*Kraftstoffverbrauch in l/100 km (kombiniert): 9.3-4.5., CO<sub>2</sub>-Emission in g/km (kombiniert): 218-119. Als Basis für die Verbrauchsermittlung gilt der ECE-Fahrzyklus. Abbildung zeigt Sonderausstattungen.*

### **BMW German advertisement translation:**

*FAHREN-WIE-NIE-ZUVOR.DE*

Expressive, dynamic, and efficient - the new BMW 5 Series Limousine impresses with its stylish design and forward-looking technologies. Numerous optional features such as Online Entertainment, the innovative dictation function or the full-color BMW

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\* [http://www.7-forum.com/bilder/news/2013/bmw\\_5er\\_printkampagne\\_p90128119-b\\_jpg.html?ref](http://www.7-forum.com/bilder/news/2013/bmw_5er_printkampagne_p90128119-b_jpg.html?ref). last access: 13.02.2024

Head-Up Display make driving even safer and more comfortable. Experience these and many other BMW ConnectedDrive technologies for intelligent connectivity and more driving pleasure now in the new BMW 5 Series at your BMW partner or at [www.bmw.de/5erLimousine](http://www.bmw.de/5erLimousine).

The new BMW 5 Series Limousine.

BMW ConnectedDrive Connected with your world.

Fuel consumption in l/100 km (combined): 9.3-4.5. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in g/km (combined): 218-119. The ECE driving cycle is used as the basis for determining fuel consumption. Illustration shows optional extras.

All isotopy levels are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The isotopy levels in the German BMW advertisement

Isotopy 1: Technology		Isotopy 2: Joy	
1	expressive	1	the joy of driving
2	dynamic	2	desire
3	efficient	3	entertainment
4	forward-looking technologies	4	driving pleasure
5	online entertainment	Isotopy 3: Manufacturer	
6	the innovative dictation function	1	new BMW 5 series limousine
7	BMW Head-Up Display	2	BMW Head-Up Display
8	BMW ConnectedDrive Technology	3	BMW ConnectedDrive Technology
9	intelligent connectivity	4	new BMW 5 Series
10	BMW ConnectedDrive	5	BMW partner
Isotopy 4: consumption		6	<a href="http://www.bmw.de/5erLimousine">www.bmw.de/5erLimousine</a>
1	Fuel consumption	7	new BMW 5 series limousine
2	l/100 km: 9.3-4.5	8	BMW ConnectedDrive
3	CO <sub>2</sub> -emissions in g/km: 218-119.	Isotopy 5: Looking	
4	determining fuel consumption	1	expressive
5	ECE-driving cycle	2	stylish
Isotopy 6: Function		3	design
1	online entertainment	4	full-color
2	dictation function		
3	head-up display		
4	safer		

5	more comfortable	
6	intelligent connectivity	

### BMW Chinese advertisement translation\*:

BMW 5 Series Limousine Exclusive service, customize your car on demand.

Keep the beautiful plan for your dream and start the new journey with an accomplished appearance. BMW 5 Series Limousine Exclusive Service offers you ten configuration selections related to entertainment, comfort, safety and so on. Create your own style while making the driving experience great. (We) Create an exclusive car for the people who keep on dreaming. BMW 5 Series Limousine Exclusive Service, guides (you) spiritually and fantastically on the road to dream. More information at 400-800-6666, or [www.bmw.com.cn](http://www.bmw.com.cn), or ask the authorized dealer in your city.

BMW 5 Series Limousine. Way of dreams, joy of beauty.

BMW ConnectedDrive. The world goes with you.

The BMW 5 Series Limousine.

Joy with BMW

All isotopy levels can be summarized in Table 2:

**Table 2.** The isotopy levels in the Chinese BMW advertisement

Isotopy 1: Dream		Isotopy 2: Traveling	
1	on demand	1	beautiful plan
2	the beautiful plan for your dream	2	start
3	keep on dreaming	3	the new journey
4	fantastically	4	experience
5	the road to dream	5	on the road
Isotopy 3: Joy		6	Way of dreams
1	beautiful plan	Isotopy 4: Specialty	
2	entertainment	1	customize your car
3	joy of beauty	2	exclusive service
4	joy	3	configuration selection
Isotopy 5: Interiority		4	your own style
1	demand	5	exclusive service
2	style	Isotopy 6: Function	
3	keep on dreaming	1	entertainment
4	spiritually	2	comfort
5	fantastically	3	safty
6	dream		

\*Original Chinese ad: <http://news.cnhubei.com/ctdsb/ctdsbsgk/ctdsb09/201305/t2567099.shtml>.  
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When comparing the isotopy levels in German and Chinese advertisements, it can be observed that at the isotopy level of each advertisement, Chinese and German BMW 5 Series cars advertisements showed several differences:

- 1) German advertisement places significant emphasis on performance description, as in the German BMW advertisement, the isotopy contains “technology” and “consumption”. This description will attract the target group who is looking for advanced technology. Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight the fuel consumption in German car advertisements, a part not necessarily required in China. Compared with the German advertisement, the Chinese advertisement focuses on the speciality. This description is mainly aimed at Chinese customers seeking distinctive experiences and individuality through the products they have. The isotopy “dream” enhances the importance of this car and promotes the status of this brand among Chinese customers. The notable difference between German and Chinese car advertisements lies in the German’s focus on practical aspects such as car technology, reflected in the inclusion of concrete content and data in their advertisements. Chinese consumers care more about the social attributes that come with the brand of the car; therefore, the description of the speciality becomes important.
- 2) The German advertisement for the BMW 5 Series cars emphasizes their aesthetic appeal, aiming to inform consumers about the innovative design features. The textual content corresponds to the visual representation of the BMW 5 Series cars depicted in the advertisement. In contrast, the Chinese advertisement employs a more poetic approach in describing the car. The isotopic element of “traveling” evokes an attractive scene, describing beautiful scenery along the road as the car drives towards its destination. Besides, the isotopy “interiority” also showed literary expressions. These narrative prompts consumers to imagine themselves traveling in their dream car – the BMW 5 Series car, appealing to basic human emotions such as fantasy, happiness, joy, and persistence, which are commonly used by Chinese ad writers.

When we observe the isotopies in these tables, it is evident that certain isotopy levels exist not only in German advertisements but also in Chinese advertisements. Examples of such isotopies include “joy”, “manufacturer”, and “function”. The concept of driving joy serves as the central slogan for this brand; thus the isotopy “joy” is prominently featured in both advertisements. BMW holds a distinguished position in the global automotive industry, particularly in China where it is synonymous with reliability and high-class standards to a certain extent. Consequently, information about the manufacturer is recurrently highlighted not only in German advertisements but also in Chinese ones. Additionally, the isotopy “function” is prominently emphasized in both advertisements, as it continues to remain a primary factor influencing the purchasing decisions of most customers considering this car.

### 3 Conclusions

Isotopy plays a crucial role in setting the focus of content to capture the target group's attention. The ad writers of these two BMW car advertisements made a very good attempt to demonstrate the different marketing strategies. The comparative analysis reveals distinct advertising cultures in Germany and China, highlighting the strategic selection of suitable isotopies as a common feature in both German and Chinese car advertisements to enhance marketing effectiveness.

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