

Function-oriented Approaches in Commercial Advertisement Translation

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Abstract—With China’s entering the World Trade Organization and the deepening of reform and opening, numerous foreign products have emerged in China’s market. In the meantime, domestic enterprises are eager to exploit the much bigger global markets. Therefore, advertisement translation plays a more and more important role in the exchange of both economy and culture. The traditional translation strategies such as faithfulness and equivalence can no longer work in the translation of advertisements. Instead, this paper tries to study the advertisement translation strategies from the point of functionalist translation theory.

Index Terms—Functional Translation Theory, advertisement translation, translation strategies

I. BACKGROUND OF FUNCTIONALIST TRANSLATION THEORY

The functional translation theory or functionalism didn’t appear overnight. It has also experienced a long period of evolution as any other theories, so here we will first make a brief introduction of its background to understand under what situation it emerged.

Functional approaches to translation were not invented until the twentieth century. The theory of dynamic equivalence was put forward by Eugene Nida based on linguistics, informatics and semiotics in 1960s, and he gave the definition like this, “translation consists in reproducing in receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message”.(Nida and Taber, 1969, p.12).Throughout history, translators usually observed that different situations called for different renderings, texts with different purposes and functions demand respective translating standards and principles which cannot easily resolved by “faithfulness” or “spirit alike”. Consequently, the translator is expected to make adaptation and modification to take care of the acceptance of target receivers. So many translators found that the process of translating should involve both procedures: a faithful reproduction of formal source-text qualities in one situation and an adjustment to meet the needs of the target audience in another. They believed that it was more important to adjust the text to the target audience’s needs and expectations.

As a break of the former translation theories, the German functionalist translation theory, with Katharina Reiss, Hans.J. Vermeer, Justa Holz-Manttari and Christiane Nord as its representatives, had opened up a new perspective to translation studies and bridge the gap between theory and practice, just as Nord (2001) said that the functionalist view of translation is intended to solve the eternal dilemmas of free vs. literal translation, adaptation vs. alienation, good interpreters vs. slavish translation and so on (p.29).

A. *Scopothorie*

Hans J. Vermeer developed Reiss’ idea with the proposal of the famous Skopos theory, which is defined as the main principle of German functionalist translation theory. “Skopos” is from Greek language, which means purpose. The Skopos translation theorists took the process of translation as a communicative action, and they believe that the translation purpose justifies the translation process, i.e. the end justifies the means. (Nord, 2001, p.124) The strategies should be chosen according to the purpose of translation and the source text only functions as the offer of information.

In order to better fit the target culture and reader’s acceptance and enhance the function of the target text, the use of translation strategies should not stick to the source-text and its function, whereas the expected functions of target text in target culture should be emphasized. Skopos theory is positioned as the core principle and the most important and representative theory of the German functionalist translation theory. The theorists of functionalist translation theory proposed three rules and elucidated their relationship. The three rules are: skopos rule, intratextual rule and intertextual rule.

B. *Text Typology*

One of the specific theories in Reiss and Vermeer’s 1984 book is Katharina Reiss’s theory of text types. This has to be appreciated in connection with Reiss’s concept of a specific translation type referred to as “communicative

translation”, which we have just seen associated with a certain notion of equivalence. According to Reiss (1984), text typology helps the translator specify the appropriate hierarchy of equivalence levels needed for a particular translation Skopos (p.156). According to the typology, “informative” text functions at introducing the objective world and phenomenon, thus the linguistic form and content must conform to the function. In the “expressive” type of text, the stylistic form should be related with the meaning of the text and the aesthetic effect should be found from the receivers’ side. “Operative” text aims at the effect beyond language and the target version of “operative” text should have the same effect on the readers.

II. DEFINITION OF ADVERTISING

Advertisement (AD) maybe classified by medium (print, electronic, out-of-home and Direct- mail advertisement), by target audience(consumer, industrial), by its function or purpose(commercial versus non commercial advertisement, direct-action versus indirect-action advertisement), or by geography (local, regional, national, international), A widely accepted working definition of advertising is that advertising is the non – personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services, or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media”. Advertisement is a sort of practical writing which has high commercial values. Language in English advertisements belongs to “loaded language”, which has highly “Persuasive Power”, It aims to inspire people’s imagination, to stimulate their emotion, to persuade customers, to purchase certain commodity. The main purpose of this study is to give an adequate analysis of the language of the interpersonal meaning of written English commercial advertising within the framework of functional linguistics. The main purpose of this study is to give an adequate analysis of the language of the interpersonal meaning of written English commercial advertising within the framework of functional linguistics.

III. FUNCTION-ORIENTED APPROACHES IN ADVERTISEMENT TRANSLATION

With the increasing of social development and the deepening of cultural and economic interaction, the position of advertisements has reached its highest point in history. The ultimate goal of all advertisements is to present the information about the product or the services and persuade the potential consumers to buy them. The advertising language is only a means to achieve this purpose. Therefore, what we need to do is to adjust the translation to the target language and target culture so that the target audience could accept it and get action.

From the perspective of functionalists, however, translators should be regarded as active participants in the chain of cross-cultural communication and translation as an integral part of the development of both intercultural exchange and professional knowledge in a given area. As far as advertisement translation is concerned, translators are supposed to be not only bilingual and bicultural, but also to equip himself with the sound knowledge of advertising. Only thus can he deal with the source text in a culturally appropriate and professional manner which will appeal to the target audience.

Accordingly, Christiane Nord (1997) summarizes three possible kinds of purpose in the field of translation: the general purpose aimed at by the translator in the translation process, the communicative purpose aimed at by the target text in the target situation and the purpose aimed at by a particular translation strategy or procedure (p.315). The communicative Skopos of advertisement is to provide, within the constraints of time and space, the most relevant information in the most effective way to persuade the audience into purchasing goods.

In the interaction of advertising, the people or agents also play an important role. For example, translators usually called upon to start translating by a client but not their own free will. In this context, the client is called an “initiator”. Then the commissioner is the person who asks the translator to produce a target text. There are also the ST (source text) producer, the TT (target text) producer, the TT user and the TT receiver. It is the advertiser, in this case, who decides what the principle is in advertisement translating.

IV. STRATEGIES OF ADVERTISEMENT TRANSLATION FROM FUNCTION-ORIENTED APPROACHES

Since advertisement translation is a creative activity, the traditional concept of “faithfulness” standard is not suitable for an advertisement translation. Scholars began to turn to a more workable one. The principle of equivalent effect was put forward. Under the guidance of functionalist translation theory, what possible strategies could be applied to reach the purpose of advertisement texts?

A. *The Commercial Effect-oriented Adaption*

The final purpose of advertisement is to move the readers and to change the attitude of the readers from skeptic to agreement. Therefore, in the advertisement composition and translation, the psychology feelings of consumers should be set as the priority. As receivers in different countries with their own acceptance habits, there are great differences in psychological between target readers and source readers. That is to say the functionality of the translation in target culture rather than the equivalent effect of the translation to the source text are translator’s concern. Applying the functionalist theory in advertisement translation means “a good advertisement translation should function as an acceptable advertisement in the target culture and help a company promote its products in the targeted market” (Jiang, 1994, p.40). Thus, the commercial effect of an advertisement translation in the target culture can be used as a standard

to evaluate its quality.

Example 1: Mercedes-Benz (automobile) is translated from 梅塞德斯 本茨 to 奔驰

Example 2: Heads&Shoulders (shampoo) is translated from 海伦仙度丝 to 海飞丝.

Obviously, the brands 奔驰 and 海飞丝 are widespread and very successful in Chinese market while 梅塞德斯 本茨 and 海伦仙度丝 have been abandoned by most consumers. The latter versions of the two brands' Chinese counterparts are better than the former ones in that they exert positive effect on both the promotion of products and the establishment of brand image. The Chinese characters 奔 and 驰 can both attract consumers with their association with comfort and speed. And in the other example, 海 gives people a feeling of freshness while 飞 indicates the desired outcome of this shampoo and 丝 is associated with smooth and silky hair for which is this product designed.

B. Linguistic Strategy

In some advertisement and brand name translations, the intratextual coherence and intertextual fidelity are together achieved in a phonetic homonymy way both in Chinese and in English. Following are the examples of advertisement and brand name translations that could account representative:

“海信” is a Chinese local brand of IT and TV products, the English brand name is translated as “Hi-Sense”, which is also a phonetic equivalent translation to the source text. The initial consonant and final sound of Chinese syllable of “海” go strictly with the consonant and vowel of “Hi” in international phonetic alphabet, i.e. [h] and [ai]. “海信” and “HI-Sense” are pronounced similarly and “Hi-Sense” also shows the feature of the brand products: sensitive and easy to control. In this TT, the skopos rule is also reflected in order to make the target consumers to know the property of the products.

“蒙牛” is the well-known dairy brand. The former English translation is just the Chinese Pinyin of the characters. From the year of 2007, the new English version of the brand name came into being: Mon Milk, which means “my milk”. “Mon” is the French word means “my”, and “Mon” shares the same consonant [m] with “蒙” in Pinyin, the final sounds of the two also seems similar. The liaison of vowel [i] and second consonant [l] of “milk” still sounds closely to the final sound [iu] of “牛” in Pinyin. “蒙牛” and “Mon Milk” have the different ideas in the literal meanings, the first tells us the location of the products, the second boosts everyone deserves this product. In the writer's opinion, the English name could better be persuasive from the view of skopos rule whereas the pronunciation has reached the purpose of intratextual and intertextual coherence.

In advertisement translation, as the purpose should be put in the first place, the arrangement of words or sentences would be changed to conform with the purpose of an advertisement:

Example 3: ST: 失去联想，人类将会怎样？

TT: Without Lenovo, Without Life. (Fang, 2003, p.46)

This is an example of C-E advertisement translation. The idea of the advertisement tells people that the Lenovo technology and computers has been closely linked with people's daily life, and it is difficult to survive if without the modern products. The English translation also conveys the same idea. The Chinese text is a form of question that makes people to think about the answer of this question. But the English advertisement directly gives out the answer “no life”, and it is composed in a different structure with the Chinese version. The Chinese slogan is a complete sentence that contains the noun “人类” as its subject and the verb “怎样” as the predicate. While translated into English, the complete sentence is changed to prepositional phrases, i.e. “without” plus objects.

This chapter proposes adaptive transfers of advertising translation as the fundamental translation strategy for advertising translation. Actually, a successful translation of advertisement requires the translator to take the target language and culture into account, and only in this way, the translator can produce an idiomatic target text which will achieve the intended goal of advertisement in target market.

C. Cultural-oriented Adaptation

Culture is an extremely complex conception and a broad subject. The translation practice, especially pragmatic translation, is not only a transfer of linguistic signs, but is related to the custom, psychology, ethnic consciousness, etc. From the perspective of functionalist translation theory, to avoid the not preferred factor in the target text is an approach to keep with the intra-textual coherence. Here are the examples:

Example 4: ST: Where there is a way, there is a TOYOTA.

TT: 车到山前必有路，有路必有丰田车。(Su, 1996, p.13)

This is a typical advertisement that uses the cultural facts to embellish the texts. The elements of idioms in English and Chinese languages both appear in the source text and target text and this characteristic decides the translation cannot be a literal one, for the equivalences in both cultures are very rare. It shows the popularity of this brand, and makes people to Chapter Four Advertisement Translation in Light of Functionalism Translation Theory imagine that no matter how bad the road is, the car would go ahead without anchor. This is a vivid image of the quality for the car of this brand. This perfect translation fully catches the cultural factors that affect the acceptance in the target context, thus the persuasive effect is emerged by its intra-textual coherence.

V. CONCLUSION

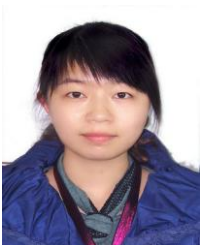
With the opening policy deepening in China, as well as China's entering WTO, the international business communication and promotion become increasingly important. The companies not only care much on domestic markets, but also endeavor to explore international market. This promotes the importance of advertising translation. Advertising translation is a subject with much room for discussion. Personnel engaged in advertising translation need to have good grounding in Chinese and English, fully understand the cultures of the two languages and guiding advertising laws and regulations of countries concerned, broaden their mind and make endeavors to make themselves "know-alls". Besides, they are advised to accumulate related knowledge on advertisement constantly. They'd better read as much as possible the advertisements printed on both Chinese and English newspapers and magazines. Moreover, those slogans on the billboards should also deserve their specific attention.

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