

On Equivalence in Advertising Translation

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Advertising translation as a type of intercultural communication and a result of international commercial communication increasingly draws the translators' attention and develops as a subject of study. To preserve the commercial attribute of the original text and ensure that the translation retains the connotation and flavor of the original text as much as possible, the translation of advertisements should follow three principles of equivalence, which are semantic equivalence, socio-cultural equivalence, and formal equivalence. The paper analyzes how to translate qualified advertising translations in terms of equivalence and introduces three translation approaches which are free translation, corresponding translation, and indirect translation that can be adopted to reach these equivalence in advertising translation.

Keywords: advertisement, advertising translation, equivalence

Advertisements and Advertising Translation

The emergence of advertising is the result of oversupply in the market. To make their products stand out from the competitors, companies use various media and platforms to advertise their brands and products. The AIDMA principle, which was first proposed by American advertising expert E.S. Lewis, concisely describes the main points of advertising, which are Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory, and Action. In short, a good advertisement needs to first attract the audience, make the audience interested in the product, make the audience feel that they want to buy the product, make the audience have a good impression of the advertisement, and finally trigger the audience to buy the product. The quality of an advertisement directly affects the audience's favorability of the brand and the conversion rate of target customers. As advertising texts have an important additional attribute-commerciality, so the translation of advertising texts can be regarded as cross-cultural communication with commercial nature. Therefore, the translation of advertisement text should not only retain the advertising feature to promote the products or enhance the brand image, but also should comply with the basic principle of translation to make it as equivalent as possible to the original text to make the audience of the translated advertisement as willing to buy the products promoted by the brand or leave a good impression on the brand as the audience of the original advertisement.

Principles of Equivalence in Advertising Translation

To preserve the commercial attribute of the original text and ensure that the translation retains the connotation and flavor of the original text as much as possible, the translation of advertisements should follow three principles of equivalence: semantic equivalence, socio-cultural equivalence, and formal equivalence. The principle of equivalence proposed here can be regarded as a variation of the functional equivalence theory proposed by Eugene A. Nida. In the theory of functional equivalence, Nida points out that “Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (Nida, 2004, p. 12). This principle is also applicable to the translation of advertisements. The key points of advertising translation will be discussed in the following sections from three perspectives: semantic equivalence, socio-cultural equivalence, and formal equivalence.

Semantic Equivalence

Semantic equivalence is the most basic and important principle in the translation of advertisements, which requires the translator to fully understand every word and phrase in the original text, taking into account both the product characteristics and the meaning of the text in the specific situation, and avoid to mislead readers. Whether it is magazine advertising, TV advertising, or platform advertising, all types of advertising require investment in publicity. If the translator misunderstands the original text, the advertisement will not only fail to promote the product but also be a waste of marketing resources.

Example (1) Do More. Work less. —Apple computer

Translation: 更多的工作，更少的时间。

Retranslation: 用更短的时间，助您完成更多的工作。

Analysis: This translation fails to reach semantic equivalence. First of all, computer as office equipment, its good performance can improve users' work efficiency under ideal circumstances. However, the translation does not reflect the high performance of the Apple computer, but rather makes the audience feel pressured that they need to get work done in a shorter time. Comparatively speaking, although the retranslation does not achieve the formal equivalence, it is semantically clearer than the original translation.

Example (2) 金龙鱼食用油

Translation: Golden Dragon Fish Edible Oil

Retranslation: Arowana Edible Oil

Analysis: In fact, “金龙鱼” is not a golden dragon or fish, but a rare ornamental fish with metallic shiny scales, whose official name is Arowana. For such cases where the trademark corresponds to physical objects, the original meaning of the trademark should be preserved as much as possible.

Example (3) 情系万家，信达天下 —China Post

Translation: Reaching everyone everywhere.

Analysis: According to this advertisement, China Post strives to solve the mailing concerns of thousands of families, and its business spans worldwide. The original sentence is exquisite, rhyming in content and compact in form. As for the translation, it not only preserves the source language's core meaning but also keeps the compact style of the advertisement. Besides, the words used in the translation are kind of colloquial, which

shortens the gap between the postal firm and its customers, making it an excellent example of advising translation.

Example (4) 岁月的小皱纹不知不觉地游走了-Maxam® face cream

Translation: Maxam erases years from your skin.

Analysis: In fact, the advertisement does not only want to express that using Maxam ® face cream can erase wrinkles, but also indicates that using Maxam ® face cream will make consumers look more youthful. Instead of using the words “wrinkles” and “swim”, the translation tactfully uses the expression—“erase years”, avoiding literal translation. Therefore, this translation corresponds well to the original advertisement in terms of semantics.

Example (5) 城市，让生活更美好! —Shanghai World Expo 2010

Translation: Better City, Better Life.

Analysis: The literal translation of “城市，让生活更美好” is “Cities make your lives better. “Although this translation is understandable, it does not reveal the reason that cities have become better with people’s efforts, nor does it reflect the key that only better cities can make people’s lives better. In other words, the translation does not reflect the dynamic relationship between people and city building. Indeed, urbanization has not only accelerated economic development, but also aggravated traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and employment difficulties, so the logic of the translation itself is not strict. On the contrary, the official translation—“Better City, Better Life” does not have the above-mentioned logical problem and also enables readers to understand the initiative role played by people in building a better city. The official translation expresses the deeper meaning of the original text and achieves a good semantic correspondence with it.

Socio-Cultural Equivalence

Socio-cultural equivalence refers that translation should not violate the cultural taboos of the target language and can be accepted by the audiences of the target language. Cultural differences have always been an inevitable problem in the translation process, and the failure of the advertising translation caused by cultural differences is not a rare case.

Example (6) 鸳鸯牌枕套

Translation: Mandarin Ducks® Pillowcase

Retranslation: Lovebirds® Pillowcase

Analysis: Most of the pillowcases of this brand are bought by newlywed couples in the hope that their marriage will be a blessing. But if “鸳鸯” is translated into mandarin ducks, its good symbolism will lose. In this case, this brand name is better to be translated as Lovebirds® Pillowcase. Lovebirds are the symbol of love in western culture. This kind of bird will stay with its only lover for the rest of its life, so lovebirds are named after their affectionate nature. For this reason, it can better express the meaning of the original brand name.

Example (7) World in hand, Soul in Cyber. —Microsoft computer

Translation: 世界在手，灵魂畅游。

Retranslation: 掌中乾坤，梦之灵魂

Analysis: In general, the translation is fine. It has end rhymes and it is symmetrical in structure. However, it lacks some Chinese cultural flavor. In contrast, in the retranslation, the word “乾坤” sublimates the tone of the whole sentence and gives Chinese consumers a sense of familiarity.

Example (8) Hero Meets Hero. —IBM server

Translation: 英雄识英雄。

Retranslation: 英雄所见略同

Analysis: “英雄所见略同” means that people with insight hold the same opinion. The retranslation quotes a sentence from *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, which not only reflects that choosing IBM is a correct choice but also deepens the audience’s impression of the advertisement by applying a famous sentence from a Chinese classic.

Formal Equivalence

In advertising translation, formal equivalency emphasizes that the translation should accurately represent the original text’s formal and rhythmic beauty. Most advertisements are carefully designed, and their form plays an important role in attracting and impressing consumers, so a qualified translator should maintain the original’s formal and rhythmic highlights across languages. A translation that lacks formal equivalency is likely to bore an otherwise appealing advertisement, lowering its commercial worth dramatically.

Example (9) Kids and grownups love it so. The happy world of Haribo. —Haribo candy

Translation: 孩子和大人们都爱它，哈瑞宝让世界更欢乐。

Retranslation: 大人小孩都说好，快乐尽在好瑞宝。

Analysis: In the original advertisement, we can find that “so” rhymes with “Haribo” and the sentence is compact. But the former translation is longer and does not have an end rhyme. In contrast, the latter is more concise, and “好” also rhymes with “宝”, which corresponds to the original sentence. So, it is more appropriate than the former one.

Example (10) Easier dusting by stre-e-etch. —Stretch dusting cloth

Translation: 拉长牌除尘布让除尘更轻松

Retranslation: 拉拉拉长，除尘力强。

Analysis: The Stretch’s cleaning cloth advertisement cleverly alters the spelling of the word “stretch”. This small alteration reinforces the stretchiness of the cloth and deepens the audience’s memory of the advertisement through repetition. The original translation weakened the advertisement’s formal features of the advertisement, but the retranslation not only reflects the reinforcement of the word stretch through repetition but also makes the expression more concise by using the negation method. In addition, “长” rhymes with “强”, making it sound well too.

Techniques of Advertising Translation for Achieving the Principles of Equivalence

The differences in expression ways and socio-cultural differences between Chinese and English languages do exist. As a result, translators may sometime fail to reach the three equivalences at the same time even with laborious effort. Therefore, having a clear sense on the priority of the three principles of equivalences is needed. Among them, semantic equivalence and socio-cultural equivalence should take precedence over formal equivalence, and formal equivalence can be adjusted according to the situation. Specifically, free translation,

corresponding translation, and indirect translation can be leveraged to reach semantic equivalence, socio-cultural equivalence, and formal equivalence in advertising translation.

Free Translation

In many cases, the highlight of the advertisement is its implication. If the original text is translated literally, the audience sometimes cannot understand the meaning of the advertisement because of the social and cultural differences and different language expression methods from the source language. For example, in Example (5), “城市，让生活更美好。” Many people lived in European countries enjoy living in the countryside and think that cities are densely populated, polluted, and stressful, so many city dwellers would like to buy or build houses in the suburbs or the countryside. For this group of people, the translation “Cities make your lives better” can hardly get their approval. In this context, the advantage of “Better City, Better Life” is clear. The key point of free translation is to break away from the formal constraints of the source language and to choose appropriate words and expressions considering the culture of the target language and the image of the product or brand being advertised.

Corresponding Translation

Corresponding translation refers to using slang, proverbs, and quotations in the target language. Slang, proverbs, and quotations should be familiar to the public and have strong emotional connotations or cultural connotations, which can effectively bring the audience closer to the advertisement. In Example (9), Hero Meets Hero, which is translated as “英雄所见略同”, a quote from the well-known *Records of the Three Kingdoms*.

The key to corresponding translation is that the translator needs to have certain literary accumulation, aware of the culture of the target language, and be able to distinguish the phrase that fits the original meaning of the advertisement.

Indirect Translation

Indirect translation refers to the conversion of the original text by using the expressions commonly used by the readers of the target language to make it easier for them to understand the advertisements. The main ways of indirect translation include negation, transformation between real and imaginary object, and replacing of images. In Example (10), from the translation 除尘更轻松 to the retranslation 除尘力强, the negation method makes the translated sentence more concise. In Example (4), using “erase years” to instead “wrinkles swim away” employ the technique of transformation between real and imaginary object, in this sentence “皱纹” are real, while years are more abstract. In Example (6), “鸳鸯牌枕套” being translated to Lovebirds Pillowcase adopts the method of replacing images to better express the meaning of the original text. The key to indirect translation is to consider things from the audience’s point of view, give full play to the effectiveness of the advertisement, and make the translation more relevant and natural.

Summary

The principles of semantic equivalence, socio-cultural equivalence, and formal equivalence in advertising translation are not standards that need to be rigidly followed, because there is no standard answer of translation for advertisements. Just like some enduring advertising translations, they were actually brewed in a moment of inspiration. In general, to deliver appropriate translations translators should consider the brand image, fully

understand the product positioning, investigate the cultural background of the target language and strengthen the use of free translation, corresponding translation and indirect translation methods. As for delivering brilliant translations, extensive reading and creative thoughts are necessary.

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