An Exploration of Translation Strategies of Global Cosmetics Brands Based on Reception Aesthetics

ZHANG Lifan, ZENG Xianghong
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

With the advancement of economic globalization, the flow of commodities from one country to another has become closer and closer. Especially in recent years, the logistics industry has been developing rapidly, overseas purchasing agents and cross-border online shopping have been enormously prevailing, and accordingly more and more British and American cosmetics expect to occupy a place in the huge market of China. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore the Chinese translation strategies for British and American cosmetic brands. Based on the theory of reception aesthetics, this thesis takes the corpus Estee Lauder, La mer, and other famous cosmetics brands. The thesis proposes several methods for translating cosmetic brands: transliteration for proper names like person or geography names; free translation to recreate brand aesthetics; creative translation for new brands; and adapted translation for divergence in language habits. Therefore, this thesis is of theoretical and practical significance as far as the field of cosmetics is concerned.

Keywords: cosmetic brands, reception aesthetics, expectation horizon, creative translation

Introduction

China ranks second in global cosmetics consumption, next only to the US, which is a huge cosmetics consumer market. By 2020, China has constructed a moderately prosperous society on all fronts. Alongside the fantastic progress in the standard of livelihood, a growing segment of the population is putting additional stock in the pursuit of a superior degree of quality of life. Among women, the sales of cosmetic brands have skyrocketed, especially the so-called “big-name cosmetics” from the UK and the US. Chinese translations of UK and US cosmetic trademarks are for this reason of utmost relevance.

Under reception aesthetics, trademark translation ought not to concentrate entirely on the discrepancies between the English and Chinese linguistic system, but also attach more importance to the divergences of the culture behind them, including consumers’ values, ways of thinking, and aesthetic orientation, so that the cultural connotation is in line with consumer psychology and the vocabulary is conveyed precisely and concisely. Overall, the reception aesthetics theory is a widely accepted theory, extremely enlightening for the translation of makeup brands.

ZHANG Lifan, M.A. candidate, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.
ZENG Xianghong (The corresponding author), Ph.D., associate professor, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.
The Reception Aesthetics and Cosmetic Brands Translation

Reception aesthetics assumes an integral place in the realm of translation. This is on account of the fact that it largely redirects the focal point of translation from the source to the audience or translator, and finalizes the mastery of the target language reader in translation. This section sought to discourse the reception aesthetics and its cardinal notions.

Main Concepts of Reception Aesthetics

Reception theory, also known as reception aesthetics, rooted in Germany in the end of the 1960s and start of the 1970s and initially surfaced in the University of Konstanz. Reception aesthetics is predominantly underpinned by phenomenological and hermeneutical theories. Among its multiple delegates, Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser are described as the two main outstanding figures, collectively initiating the field of literature acceptance by their sharp theoretical insight and creativity. Inspired by Gadamerian Hermeneutics, Jauss highlights readers’ expectation horizon and aesthetic experience, particularly their vibrant and ever-changing expectation horizon. He views reading an exchange from reader to text. As a result, reception aesthetics emerges from a union of two perspectives.

First, horizon of expectation is a horizon of experience, a material horizon of conditions, a horizon which contains not only literary norms and values, but also desires, demands, and aspirations (Holub, 1984, p. 68). Second, both Jauss and Iser are convinced that the function of the audience is imperative in the ultimate realization of literature, and that without the audiences’ proactive engagement, it turns out to be a bunch of nonsense. Third, according to Iser’s (1978) idea, the text is indeterminate until the audience recognizes it. He points out meaning is the result of an interaction between the two, which means that meaning is neither purely textual nor totally subjective… (p. 123). Finally, vocative structure is one more of Isser’s remarkably valuable insights, connoting blanks and indeterminacy in meaning, connection gaps in semantic units and mental gaps resulting from the denial of the readers habitual will. Literary works with vocative structure are an open text system, which will attract readers’ participation (Liu, 2016, p. 58).

The Enlightenment of Reception Aesthetics Theory on Cosmetic Brands Translation

According to Roger T. Bell (1991), translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences (p. 5). By studying the translation of international cosmetic brands, translators find that cosmetics companies should turn their research direction to consumers instead of simply introducing the product itself. Wang Dongfeng (1997) believed translation is not merely a linguistic activity, but intrinsically a cultural interaction (p. 56). Consequently, throughout the translation work, the translator ought to adequately consider the customers’ anticipation of the linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic experience.

Strengthening the role of consumer. Jauss (1982a) hold that the merit of a literary history based on aesthetics of reception will depend upon the extent to which it can take an active part in the ongoing totalization of the past through aesthetic experience (p. 20). The translations audiences need to be perceived as the protagonist, and their aesthetic experience ought to be amply mobilized. The most important enlightenment for the translator is to change the orientation, place the customer in the center of the study when translating, and try to get closer to what they accept and what their aesthetic is when translating.

For example, there is a well-known American cosmetic brand MAC (Makeup Art Cosmetics), whose full name can be literally translated to “美容艺术化妆品”, but the company uses the transliteration method. “魅”
means “attractive”, and “可” means “can, enable”. “魅可” is perfectly combined to enable people to become beautiful and attractive. This translation approach contemplates the anticipation of Chinese consumers while reserving the phonetic features of overseas trade-marks, mirroring larger scale of Chinese civilization and prevailing values.

Conforming to expectation horizon of readers. Usually, people think that the audience is passive and can only passively accept literary works. In fact, before he or she is exposed to and interpret a certain literary work, the audiences thinking cognition is not a blank board. Instead, he has his own thinking tendency grounded in previous literary perusal and cultural perceptions. These thinking tendencies and cultural cognitive aesthetic tastes are called expectation horizon.

For example, MAX FACTOR is from its initiator Mr. Max Factor. Its Chinese translation is “蜜丝佛陀”, a culturally oriental name. These four words, which resonate with the original name, are also rich in meaning: “蜜”—flexible like honey, “丝”—exquisite like silk, evocatively delivered the moist and silky qualities of lipstick, reminding women of its ability to give them a sense of well-being. On top of that, the “佛陀” embodies enlightened living and mirrors the inward sagacity of these women possessing a more profound perspective on their lives after years of sedimentation. For example, Clean & Clear (“可伶可俐”) is a skincare brand aimed at young girls. This tag refers to the “clean and clear”, stating the distinctive features of make-up products that evoke a pure and refreshing face. Chinese translation of “可伶可俐” adopts harmonic sound of “伶俐” and the word “可” used in double sound in Chinese precisely. From the perspective of prosodic beauty, the translated name “可伶可俐” skillfully departs from the compound words of “伶俐” by inserting “可……可……” and forms “four-character” word. It not only reads crisply and has a concordant rhythm, but also features the youthfulness of adolescence and satisfies effectively the group of consumers of the product.

Creating more blankness and indeterminacy. Blankness and indeterminacy are regarded as two essential notions in vocative structure. The blankness and indeterminacy will provoke the interest and fantasy of the subject readers. With an expanding market for foreign cosmetics imports, certain western corporations still prefer directly applying their own original brand names, to render these trademarks for sales promotion. It is an innovative and bold sales strategy.

Take the famous cosmetic brand Skin Ceuticals, a subsidiary of the LOreal Group as an example. Its Chinese version is consistent with the original Skin Ceuticals. Enterprise positions it as a high-end brand. Due to the high positioning and value of the brand itself, translation strategy accepted by the mass was abandoned in order to preserve the ethos and high-end image of the original brand name. It also maintains an exotic atmosphere, excites customers’ intrigue, and places them in a more imaginative position for sales promotion.

The Methods for Cosmetics Brands Translation

Reception aesthetics is one of the most powerful theories as regards the sphere of translation theories. Upon the reception aesthetics, this thesis suggests the following methods that can facilitate the cosmetic brands translating, including transliteration, free translation, creative translation, and adapted translation.

Transliteration

Transliteration means using words or mixtures of words that are harmonized in another language, and these words or mixtures of words are not existing meaningful words in original language (Qiu, 2001, p. 26). From the angle of the initiator of translation, transliteration can allow a brand to pronounce in a similar way in another
country, facilitate the spread of the brand, and safeguard the product identity, as well as contribute to reinforcing the credibility and affinity among consumers worldwide.

The famous American cosmetics brand ESTEE LAUDER has its roots in the founder Estée Lauder. The “雅诗兰黛” in translation sounds quite close to the original. The Chinese translation of Estee Lauder is a wonderful description of the fabulous feminine quality, as elegant as poetry, as refined as orchids, and as beautiful as the eyebrows. More importantly, those four characters are pronounced in different tones, with a strong sense of rhythm. AVON (“雅芳”) is born from Stratford-on-Avon, a river in the hometown of Shakespeare. A brand named after a place name could entice more clients to the brand by capitalizing on the location’s good reputation.

For instance, MAYBELLINE is translates as “美宝莲”. Considering its “莲”, it has the reputation of “slitting but don’t dye” since ancient times in the long history of Han culture, and it is close to showing the flower language of glamorous. In ancient Egyptian mythology, it was venerated as a “holy flower”. Fresh (馥蕾诗) adopts transliteration, using Chinese characters that highlight femininity and aesthetics. Upon the resemblance of intonation, the translated also has a wonderful symbol, alluring women to purchase. The original meaning of “馥” means “fragrant smell and strong aroma”, “蕾” refers to “the flowers with buds”, and “诗” embodies literary and artistic beauty, which all conform to aesthetics experience and expectation horizon of users.

**Free Translation**

Xu Yuanchong (1980) said, free translation is a translation method that puts the content of the original text in the first place and the form of the smooth translation in the second place, without being bound to the form of the original text (p. 8). Newmark (2001) presented a well-defined account of free translation, stating that free translation reproduces the matter without the manner, or the content without the form of the original (p. 24).

For example, the American cosmetics brand NEUTROGENA is initially from the Latin script neutralis and genus, demonstrating rebirth, which is translated as “露得清”. The target text does not have the idea of literally translating the name of the brand, but is translated as “露得清” in combination with the characteristics and effects of the brand, conveying the refreshing and moisturizing effect after applying it. Furthermore, take the American high-end cosmetic brand La mer (“海蓝之谜”) as an example. In French, “la” refers to the “the”, and “mer” indicates “ocean”. When people talk about La mer, a wide range of blue will be at the forefront of their minds, thus associating this brand birthed in the ocean, which is appropriate for all skins. Moreover, “之谜” creates more indeterminacy and blankness, thus fortifying the fascination.

**Creative Translation**

“Creative translation occurs when innovative ideas are added to certain translation guidelines to achieve an unanticipated re-translation effect” (Zheng & Cao, 2018, p. 182). Creative translation is the most creative act in translation, which transcends the paradox between free and literal translation in traditional translation theory, erases the dichotomy between faithfulness and rebellion, and gets rid of the uncertainty between spiritual resemblance and formal resemblance (Wang, 2015, p. 141). Translation of cosmetic brands is a creative task that requires more effort, creativity, and ingenuity. There are two types of creative translations: creative translation combined with transliteration and creative translation combined with liberal translation.

On the one hand, there is a classic example of creative translation combined with transliteration and that is Clinique (“倩碧”). Clinique’s original meaning in German refers to “clinic”. When the brand entered the Chinese niche, the firm translated the first word as “倩” based on the phonetic pronunciation, implying “beauty and charm”. The second word “碧” possesses an extra innovative sense, which means “green”, which is conducive
to echoing the brand’s trademark of green characters on a white background. Moreover, “骊” gives people a clean texture and the sense of smallness.

On the other hand, based on creative translation combined with free translation, there are plenty of cosmetics examples. Just as ORIGINS (“悦木之源”), it is positioned to provide consumers with plain and natural premium skincare and cosmetics brand. Although the Origins itself denotes “起源”, “悅木之源” in Chinese, only the final word is used to denote the meaning of “起源”, while the first three words are more closely integrated with the product logo, representing the concept of “close to nature” and “purity” of the brand. The translation flexibly presents a plant-derived and natural cosmetic brand, which also shows magical energy of plants. Innovative brand name increases the reader’s freshness and meets the customers’ expectation horizon, so as to realize the promotion.

**Adapted Translation**

Adapted translation, as the name implies, is a mixture of adaptation and translation. Adapted translation, because of cultural discrepancies, requires content adaptation of the original text first to make it fit the sociocultural needs of the target language and the possibility of language expression before translation. Adapted translation refers to a translation activity in which one or several original works are processed before translation depending on the exceptional requests of the translation object (Liu & Huang, 2001, p. 42). In the translation process, utilizing proverbs or idioms can narrow the chasm of perception caused by the cultural diversity. The aphorisms or old adages of Chinese have something in common with that of English. They have common features: rhythmic beauty and short structure.

For instance, REVON (“露华浓”) can achieve a fusion of vision with Chinese readers. It cites the famous verses describing Yang Guifei (one of the highest-ranking imperial concubines of a Tang Dynasty Emperors in the 8th century and one of the four beauties of ancient China) “云想衣裳花想容，春风拂槛露华浓”, written by the great poet Li Bai, which could considerably entice the appetite of Chinese customers. The original meaning of “露华浓” is that the peony flowers are more colorful with crystal dewdrops. When used as the name of cosmetics, it seems that you can see the enchanting flower-like appearance and graceful style of a beautiful woman like Yang Guifei. A translated name like “露华浓” will certainly obtain the preference of Chinese females. Revlon itself is a combination of several founders’ names with no real meaning, but its Chinese translation, based on syllables, makes an adaptation and uses ancient Chinese poetry to make it rich in brand connotation and aesthetic value, in line with consumers’ vision of expectation and aesthetic experience.

In conclusion, this thesis mainly explores the methods of cosmetic brands translation in the field of reception aesthetics, including transliteration, free translation, creative translation, and adapted translation, which all are of extremely importance for cosmetic brands.

**Conclusion**

With the advent of the big data era and interconnected global economies, the increasing role of cosmetic trademark translations has led to a higher demand for translation standards than ever before. Taking 13 English cosmetics from British and American and their Chinese translations as examples collected from online shopping websites, offline cosmetics counters, and others, this thesis presents an empirical study of the Chinese translation of cosmetic trademarks in the context of reception aesthetics. Based on this theory and traits of US and UK cosmetic trademarks, this thesis reveals the following conclusions to be of substantial value for the Chinese
translation of real-life cosmetic brands. Firstly, this thesis introduced the main conceptions of reception aesthetics, chiefly comprising Jauss’s horizon of expectations, the subjective status of the reader from receptor language, and the indeterminacy and blankness, as well as Iser’s vocative structure. Secondly, guided by the reception aesthetics, this thesis explores the enlightenments on cosmetic trademarks translation: fortifying the role of readers, responding to expectation horizon of readers, and creating more blankness and indeterminacy. Lastly, translators should take methods like transliteration, free translation, creative translation, and adapted translation, which can heighten the appeal of the cosmetic brands, so as to capture and motivate consumers to purchase. However, due to the limitation of time and knowledge, this thesis inevitably suffers from some limitations. Accordingly, further research can be done to investigate the elements of globalization, brand extension, or something else that may have a dramatic influence on brands translation.

References