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## On Translation of Advertisements from the Perspective of Culture

### SUR LA TRADUCTION DE PUBLICITÉ DANS UNE PERSPECTIVE CULTURELLE

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**Abstract:** Each language contains elements which are derived from its culture, such as idioms, proverbs, and other fixed expressions. Translation is not only an inter-lingual transfer, but also a cross-cultural communication. Along with the development of the economy and science, globalization is a more increasingly obvious phenomenon. There is a closer and closer relationship between countries. So the intercultural advertisements are becoming common. The inter-cultural advertisements transmission is to communicate with the consumers from different regions, different nations, different countries and different societies. And the politics, economy and cultural situations in these areas are different from those in their own nations. And in all of these differences, the difference between cultures is the one that has the greatest and the most direct influence on the transmission of advertisements. If one wants to do well in advertisements translation, one must have a good knowledge about the culture whose language is his target language. And in the transmission of advertisements, knowing what one should do is as important as knowing what one should not do. In this paper, the author takes into consideration the cultural factors that affect the translation of the intercultural advertisements and then offer some suggested strategies when doing the translation.

**Key words:** culture difference; intercultural advertisements; translation strategies

**Resumé:** Chaque langue contient des éléments qui sont issus de sa culture, tels que les expressions idiomatiques, les proverbes et autres expressions fixées. La traduction n'est pas seulement un transfert interlinguistique, mais aussi une communication interculturelle. Avec le développement de l'économie et de la science, la mondialisation devient un phénomène évident. Les relations entre les pays sont de plus en plus étroites. Ainsi, les publicités interculturelles sont de plus en plus communes. La transmission inter-culturelle des publicités est de communiquer avec les consommateurs de régions différentes, de pays différents et de sociétés différentes. Et le contexte politique, économique et culturel de ces zones est différent de celui de leurs propres pays. Dans

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toutes ces différences, la différence entre les cultures est celle qui a l'influence la plus grande et la plus directe sur la transmission de publicité. Si l'on veut bien traduire les publicités, il faut avoir une bonne connaissance de la culture de la langue ciblée. Et dans la transmission de publicités, il est aussi important de savoir ce que l'on doit faire et ce que l'on ne devrait pas faire. Dans cet article, l'auteur prend en considération les facteurs culturels qui influent sur la traduction de publicité interculturelles et ensuite offre des stratégies lors de la traduction.

**Mots-clés:** différence culturelle; publicités interculturelles; stratégies de traduction

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Inter-cultural advertisements translation and transmission have a close relationship with the cultures of the target language. Recently with opening-up and development of China, more and more people believe that international advertisement's cultural translation has very important effect on the world. Nowadays, China is open to the world and its international advertisement is increasingly thriving. It is not only bringing some new products and introducing service, but also is becoming a media of the transmission of culture. The advertisement is not only a means of economic activity, but also of cultural communication. It is like a kind of invisible force which directs the living styles and consumption habits of the people. Commodity is itself a carrier of culture, the culture is transmitted according to commodity, and at last the commodity increases in value by the means of culture. So when doing the translation of the inter-cultural advertisements, he or she must pay much attention to the cultural factors and the strategies that he or she use.

## **2. MAIN BODY**

Today one can hardly escape advertisements as we are living in a very commercial society. The advertisement is not only a means of economic activity, but also of cultural communication. It is like a kind of invisible force which directs the living styles and consumption habits of the people. When doing the translation of the inter-cultural advertisements, the translators must pay much attention to the cultural factors. And here first there are some factors that affect the translation of advertisements.

### **2.1 The language**

Language is a part of the culture and at the same time the carrier of it. And every kind of language has its own conventional meaning according to its culture. Culture is the general environment of different activities in language. Language is strongly influenced and shaped by culture just as a mirror. Culture is reflected in language, and at the same time it exists in the intellectual structures that a certain group use their language. Language is the carrier and container of culture and it also exerts its influence on culture. It is concluded that language and culture are closely related, influencing and shaping each other. To learn a foreign language implies to learn the culture in which it is spoken. The culture reflects the characteristics of a nation, not only including the historical and cultural background but also implying the attitude of the nation to life, their living style as well as their way of thinking. Advertisements, as a part of the language therefore are reflected by culture. So when the translators are doing the translation, their understanding of the advertisements can not be delimited to the literal meaning of them, they must know the deeper meaning and try to understand them from the cultural angle. That is to say, they must "read between the lines". The advertisements from different countries always include proverbs, sayings, and famous people and well-know poems. Sometimes they are blank in the culture whose language they are to be translated into which means they do not have counterparts in that language and sometimes there will be contradictions when doing the translation. So it is difficult for the translators to do a good job when their work concerns the different cultures because what can be accepted or even valued sometimes can not be accepted in other culture(s). There are some English versions here of the Chinese advertisements which are just translated

according to their literal meaning. General speaking, there are four reasons for these mistakes. The first one is that the translations are not preferable in the judgment of the culture. For example, the dragon is a divine totem in the Chinese culture, and is greatly admired by the Chinese people and the Chinese people consider themselves as the descendants of the dragon. But in the English-speaking countries, dragon is a terrible animal, which is quite different from its traditional image in the Chinese culture. The problem that is stated above is the common one the translators encounter in their work. Therefore, in these situations, the work of the translators seems to be very hard and they should have comprehensive knowledge and social experience so that they can do a good job.

## **2.2 The customs**

It is not easy to change the customs of a country. Each country has its own taboos, whether it is in this aspect or in that one. We can not change the customs and taboos that has come into being for thousands of years, what we must do is to comprehend them and show our respect to them. Different traditional customs have great influences on advertisements. So for inter-cultural advertisement transmission, only in the condition that we know and respect the local customs, can we make our advertisements fruitful.

To respect the local customs means that the advertisements can not offend the local taboos, otherwise some avoidable problems will be caused and sometime even the rejects. For example, in some eastern countries where sex is a taboo such as Thailand and India, if the advertisements have something to do with sex, they will probably offend the customs. The Listerine tried to use its advertisement in Thailand, which was a great success in America, but when it was used in Thailand, it was not the case at all. The advertisement describes a boy and a girl, hand in hand, one suggesting that the other should use the Lister to cure his difficulty in breathing. This advertisement in Thailand was a failure because it is unacceptable to describe the relationship between a boy and a girl in public occasions. And finally when the company changed the boy and the girl into two girls, the sales of the products greatly increased.

The people in different countries have different taboos. For examples, the English don't like dragons but they are rather fond of dogs; the Italians and Spanish love roses, not chrysanthemum; Lotus, fox, and badger are taboos to the Japanese, but they like cherry blossom, tortoise and duck very much; the Russian look on yellow rosebush as something unlucky and a symbol of breaking off; the French and Belgian consider walnut, peacock and chrysanthemum something unlucky; some countries in North Africa don't like the pictures of dogs; the country that advocate Islam don't use the pigs and dogs as their brands.

Sometimes the colors, numbers and shapes, symbols and even some body languages can be taboos in other countries and if we don not use them carefully, we will offend the cultures in other countries because in different cultures the colors, numbers and the images of animals have different meanings. When the translators are doing their woks their consideration should also be paid to the colors. And different countries like or dislike different colors. For examples, the Belgian do not like blue and they consider it as a sign of unluckiness; the Japanese people hate the color of green while the Indian like it very much. And we all know that the number thirteen is a taboo in the western countries. The Budweiser beer company has used frog as it representative of advertisements and it is very impressive. But in Puerto Pico it uses a local sign of luckiness named "coqui" because frog is considered unclear there. And there is another example, when the company of the toothpaste "Colgate" is exploring its market in Malaysia, it emphasize the function of whitening the teeth. But in that region, the black and yellow teeth are a sign of highness and elegance and the people there blacken their teeth by chewing the arecas. So the function of the toothpaste is acting contrarily. In most occasions people get used to seeing other cultures and habits with their own point of view and therefore usually offend the taboos of other cultures. There are a lot of taboos in different countries and some of them are even strange to us because we do not have the same taboos with them and so we do not understand them. But the translators should collect different materials and do different research and try to know as many taboos as possible. Only in this way, can they do very good translation and make the advertisements successful in the international market.

## **2.3 Value**

Every person and every nation will act in the control of some certain idea of value. People with different ideas of value will consider the same thing differently. And advertisements, as the transmission carriers of

products information and cultural information, will surely integrate with the ideas of value in a certain culture. And in the inter-cultural advertisement transmission, the factor that affects the influence of the advertisements greatly is the differences in ideas of value in different cultures because it is the idea of value that determines the psychological idea, the moral principles and the attitudes. So once the advertisements convey the different ideas of value, they will be against with. The famous advertisement of "NIKE", "Just do it", is famous and favored by the people in the United States. But the idea of value that it declares is not acceptable in Hong Kong and in Thailand and is lodged complaints over for a few times because it is thought to have lured the teenager to be irresponsible and to do something bad. And at last the Nike Company is forced to change its advertisement.

#### **2.4 The religion**

Religion is a kind of spiritual phenomenon. And when we look at it from the angle of consumption, we may find out that it contains not only the spiritual consumption, but also the material consumption, and satisfies the "double" needs of the people. And from the angle of transmission, it is the factor that can draw attention from the mass. So if religion is used to transmit advertisements, it can draw a lot of focus from the people and have irresistible attraction and charisma. But at the same time, religion is a sensitive topic and can lead to conflicts easily and seen from the point of advertisement transmission, it is a success in itself. In the history of the advertisement transmission both in China and in the western countries, there are a lot of examples relating advertisements to religion. And it is not rare that some religion elements are not used properly and finally lead to dissensions and conflicts in the field of international advertisements. In the spring of 1985, the superstar Madonna starred an advertisement for the PEPSI Cola which cost five million US dollars. Later it became the MTV for her new song. The advertisement was broadcast in the United States and other more than 40 countries at the same time and was greatly appreciated. But Madonna later put this advertisement into rock version without the PEPSI Company knowing it. In this new version, Madonna jumps before the burning cross, shows the scratches on her palms and kiss a black saint on the bench in the church. And this MTV immediately irritated the public and the PEPSI had to draw back its advertisement.

#### **2.5 The law**

There is a big difference in requirements of the content, the style and the transmission of the advertisements among the laws of different countries. It is a common trend in the field of advertisement that the government has enforced its control on advertisements in the perspective of law. Every country has its own rules, disciplines and policies about the carrying out of the advertisements, and they constrain and influence the international advertisements directly. So in the transmission of the inter-cultural advertisements, it is necessary to know about the law background and know and obey the concerning rules and policies of different countries. Generally speaking, the laws concerning the advertisements in countries contain the following parts:

(1) the restriction to the advertisements of some products. For example, the European Conference passed a decision in 2003 which forbids the advertisements of cigarettes in newspapers, broadcast and the internet from the July of 2005, and it also forbids the tobacco companies to sponsor any international matches. This decision is to reduce the stable high quantity of tobacco consumption in Germany, Greece and Spanish. (But the areas that tobacco advertisements are forbidden do not include the TV station, because the tobacco advertisements on TV are protected by some other laws in the European Community)

(2) the restriction to the information of the advertisements. The comparative advertisements that frequently appear in the United States are forbidden in the United Kingdoms and Germany. The laws of advertisements in many countries forbid the companies to use children as their representatives. In Srilanka it is not allowed to use children as representatives to promote the products in the TV advertisements, and the reason is that the people there are poor, and 20% of the 1.6 million people are under the line of the poverty. And for those parents who can not afford the products, seeing the advertisements will make them sad and embarrassed.

(3) the restriction to the medias of advertisements. Advertisements are forbidden on the television in Belgium, Sweden and Denmark. In France, the time for advertisements on television is less than 13 minutes every day. In Germany, it's less than 27 minutes; in Swiss it is as much as 150 minutes; and in America, the time limitation is even looser, which is 180 minutes on each channel every day. In Japan, it is ruled that each advertisement should be in less than 15 seconds.

There are a lot of books and articles that have talked about the strategies of translation. Some of them are very general and can be applied in the translation of advertisements, but because of the specialty of the characteristics of the advertisements, some other strategies are introduced here to satisfy the needs of the translators doing the advertisements translation. According to the different cultural factors which are mentioned above, in the following part some translating strategies are suggested.

At first, the translators should have a good command of the advertisements and the characteristics of the products. On the one hand, they should know the quality of the products, the functions of the products, as well as the cultural custom. Value and prestige are not very important. On the other hand, the translators should know very well the "six Ms" and pay much attention to them. And the "six Ms" are: market(the understanding and knowledge of the target marker of the advertisements), message (the good and strong points of the advertisements, the correct information of the advertisement), media (in what kind of media will the advertisements be transmitted to the receivers of the information), motion (the relevant marketing and promotion of the goods), measurement (the measurement of the advertisements, including the estimation of it before the advertisements, in the advertisements and after the advertisements ) and money(the money that is used in the advertisements). Only in this way can the translators have a good control of the translation that they are doing.

Next, translators should have a good knowledge of the cultural tradition and the consumption psychology of the people in the cultural whose language is their target language. Different cultures have different taboos in different perspectives. What we must do is to understand them, to know them and to show, respect to them. Whether it be in this aspect or in that one. So when doing the translation, the translators must pay much attention to the cultural differences and try not to make any mistakes. To achieve this aim, they must collect different materials and do different research. Only by this means, can the translators do the translation very well.

Lastly, the translators should put forward new ideas and spirit to the translation of the advertisements. And there is an Italian saying. "Traduttori, traditori," the advertisements itself is full of imagination and creativity. When the translators are doing the translations from one culture to another one, there are a lot of things that must be paid attention to. They are. Social cultures, languages, national characteristics, psychologies and so on. Translation should keep the basic and equal semantic structure and make the translation make sense in the target language.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The topic of the cultural factors in the translation of the advertisements is one that has been long paid attention to and researched. A lot of books and articles have talked about this problem. Despite of all the efforts that have been made, further research is still in terrible need. To level the quality of the translation of the inter- cultural advertisements, the translators need to do further research and do more practice in this field.

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