

On Advertisement Translation from the Perspective of English-Chinese Cultural Differences

Meng Qin^{1*}

¹ Shandong Agriculture And Engineering University, Jinan, China

* Meng Qin, E-mail: mengqinsd2004@126.com

Received: June 10, 2017

Accepted: June 21, 2017

Online Published: June 22, 2017

doi:10.22158/wjer.v4n3p388

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v4n3p388>

Abstract

There are great differences between Chinese and Western cultures and therefore knowing the English-Chinese cultural differences and then making a proper cultural transformation is the key to success of advertisement translation. This paper attempts to explore on advertisement translation as well as its methods and strategies from the perspective of English-Chinese cultural differences and realize the cultural equivalence of advertisement translation besides semantic equivalence and functional similarity.

Keywords

advertisement translation, English-Chinese cultural differences, cultural equivalence

1. Introduction

With the further development of international division and strength of the tendency of economic globalization, the international business communication becomes more and more frequent. Every country tries their best to sell their own commodities in order to enter into the international market, of which advertising is one of the most effective marketing tools. In China, the further adoption of open-policy and China's entry into the WTO bring us into a fierce worldwide competition. At this critical moment, Chinese enterprises need to take advantage of the marketing tool of international advertising to firmly establish their brands in the global marketplace. Only in this way can our national enterprises possess competitive edge and permanent vitality. Translation is a cross-cultural inter-language communication, so if we are not familiar with the English-Chinese cultural differences and then make a proper cultural transformation, it is impossible for us to transfer the textual material in the source language into the equivalent one in the target language readers in advertisement translation. Therefore, translating advertisement from the perspective of English-Chinese cultural differences can realize the cultural equivalence of advertisement translation besides semantic equivalence and functional similarity, which may be very helpful and significant for Chinese commodities to enter into

the international market.

2. English-Chinese Cultural Differences in Advertisement Translation

First, the meaning of translation should be defined. As Newmark (1982) pointed out, translation is namely written in modern language, which is in itself a form of interpretation, and lexically at least a reflection of the target language culture. The target language readers should get the same reading experience as that of the source language. "Translation in this meaning is a kind of intercultural communication". Here the author defines translation as an activity of the exchange of two cultures and a kind of cross-cultural language communication. If we don't realize the English-Chinese cultural differences, we cannot achieve functional equivalence in advertisement translation.

2.1 Cultural Differences

Culture is an extremely ambiguous and intriguing concept. It embraces almost everything in the world, whether material or spiritual. Cultural differences do exist everywhere between two different cultures. They may involve conflicting customs, habits, religions, beliefs, modes of thought, values, to name just a few. For example, there are cultural differences between China and the English-speaking countries in understanding the word "dragon". Dragon is the spiritual totem of the Chinese nation and therefore the Chinese people are regarded as the "Successors of the Dragon". In contrast, dragon a vicious, fire breathing creature that brings bad luck to people in English-speaking countries. In the Bible the devil Satan was regarded as the great dragon. What's more, it is also has the meaning of "shrew". Therefore, "dragon" has different imagination between Chinese and English-speaking people and the translators should be very careful to translate it.

As a matter of fact, cultural differences are the most serious problems faced by translators, which lead to the misunderstanding of target language readers. Besides, difficulties arising from the formal differences are really caused by cultural differences. Therefore, translations should solve the difficulties arising from cultural differences to begin with and its process is also the process of cultural exchange. Speaking more specially, the solving of the difficulties arising from cultural differences determines the informativeness and effectiveness of make up the degree of cultural exchange.

2.2 English-Chinese Cultural Differences in Advertisement Translation

2.2.1 Customs and Habits

Customs and habits are socially acceptable ways of behaving. It also refers to enforcement of export and import laws of a country. Different countries have different customs and habits. There are obvious cultural differences between Chinese and English-speaking countries in customs and habits. For example, the other two names for "Shaoxing" rice wine, a famous Chinese wine, are "Daughter's Wine" and "Scholar's Wine". These two names come from some Chinese ancient customs and habit in Shaoxing, a city in Zhejiang Province in P. R. China. When a couple gave birth to a daughter, a bottle of wine is buried under the ground. When the daughter got married, they will serve guests with the wine, which is the reason why it is called "the daughter's wine". However, when a couple gave birth to

a son and they hoped him to become No. 1 scholar, a bottle of wine is also buried under the ground. If their son became No. 1 scholar in the highest imperial examination, they will serve guests with the wine for celebration, which is the reason why it is also called “scholar wine”. The advertisement translation must pay attention to the English-Chinese cultural differences and cater for the TL customs and habits so that it can produce positive effects and avoid misunderstanding.

2.2.2 Religion

Religion is a kind of cultural phenomenon, which belongs to social ideology when human society develops to a certain historical stage. The main features of religion are that there are mysterious supernatural forces or entities in the real world, which have absolute authority to dominate the natural evolution, determine the fate. Religion often has a moral code to regulate human behavior. For instance, Christianity is the dominant world outlook of English-speaking countries. Christians firmly believe that “in its founder God was made manifest in the flesh and dwelt among men”. People believe strongly in the evil, while the Chinese culture is mainly under the influence of Confucianism. The Chinese welcome harmony. As Zhang Xiuhua (2006) pointed out, harmony is one of the original values of Chinese culture especially Confucianism, which believes that “harmony” is the ultimate goal of human behavior. For instance, the following is the advertisement of Kodak film.

Slogan: Kodak is Olympic Color.

Version: 柯达胶卷, 天国的色彩.

As we all know, Christianity is also the dominant world view found in America and people in the USA tend to believe in heaven, so the version translates “Olympic Color” into “天国的色彩”, which reflects the characteristic of the SL and make a successful cultural transformation.

2.2.3 Values

Values, according to Thierdeman (1991), form the core of a culture, are social principles, goals, or standards accepted by persons in a culture. They establish what is proper and improper behavior as well as what is normal and abnormal one. The values of English-speaking countries include individualism, freedom, equality, materialism, competition, efficiency, directness, openness, while the Chinese values in contrast include collectivism, belonging, seniority, virtue, cooperation, quality, indirectness and go-between. Among all these differences, individualism vs. collectivism is the most striking in advertisement translation. For example, in English advertisements such words as “individual”, “individuality”, “personal”, “independent”, “independence”, “private”, “privacy” can be found frequently. Therefore, during the course of advertisement translation, we should pay attention to it and realize the transformation between individualism and collectivism. The following advertisement translation of Gillette shave is a successful example.

Chinese Text: 所有这些感应技术给您的脸部提供了最具个性化的剃须刀—最妥帖, 最滑爽, 最舒适. 一个男人所能得到的最好的剃须刀.

English Version: All these sensor technologies combine to give your individual face a personalized shave—the closest, smoothest, safest, and most comfortable. The best shave a man can get.

This English version uses “individual”, “personalized”, “a man”, etc., which reflects its cultural tendency of individualism, so it realizes the successful cultural transformation.

2.2.4 Modes of Thought

The Chinese modes of thought is whole, subjective and obscure, while the English modes of thought is concrete, analyzable, abstract, objective and exact. In a word, Chinese emphasizes comprehensiveness, perception and authority, so its modes of thought is noumenal, while English emphasizes analysis, rationality and truth, so its modes of thought is objective.

Chinese traditional culture emphasizes unity and respects absolute authority, while the English-speaking countries emphasize rationality and the authority of truth. They usually use experiments, data or investigation results to persuade customers.

Therefore, during the course of advertisement translation, the translator should pay attention to these cultural differences and try to realize the cultural exchange successfully.

2.2.5 Beliefs

Beliefs are significant to the study of international communication because they are at the core of our thoughts and actions. They are our conviction in the truth of something. They tell us how the world operates. English and Chinese cultures have different belief systems. The English-speaking people most likely believe that the means of production should belong to individuals in sole proprietorships, or to several individuals in partnerships, or to numerous people in corporations. While Chinese may very likely believe that business and the means of production should belong to the state or to the people collectively. For instance, when the famous advertisement “Nike, just do it”. was first shown in the TV programs in Hong Kong, its version is “耐克, 想做就去做”. The slogan is very suitable in the USA which emphasizes individualism and freedom, while in it is not so suitable Hong Kong because people in Hong Kong are more self disciplined and they may think that it has the tendency of persuading the youngsters to do wrong and charge this advertisement version with the above reason. At last, the version has to be revised as “应做就去做” to solve the problem.

3. The Methods of Advertisement Translation

Traditionally, the two major methods of translation have been literal and free translation. Here three main methods of advertisement translation will be introduced, that is literal translation, free translation and combination of literal and free translation.

3.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to a translation method which requires the translation to be consistent with the original in terms of grammatical structures and expressions, and it can maintain both the original content and the original text. Therefore literal translation is the most effective way of enriching TL and its culture. The following examples are all successful in literal translation.

(1) The Relentless Pursuit of Perfection.

Chinese Version: 专注完美, 近乎苛求.

(2) When you come, you are a guest of ours; when you leave, we are the friends of yours (Central Hotel).

Chinese Version: 来是他乡客, 去时故人心 (中心大酒店).

It must be pointed out that literal translation is not equal to word-for-word translation. By applying the method of literal translation we should possibly preserve cultural messages of the original text and the readability of the target language version. Therefore, proper translation is the most effective way for cultural exchange. For example:

(1) A work of art. -Scotch Whisky

Chinese Version: 艺术精品 (苏格兰威士忌酒).

(2) There's never been a better Time (Time Weekly).

Chinese Version: 从未有过的好时代 (时代周刊)

The above versions not only preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language but also remain the readability of the target language version.

3.2 Free Translation

Free translation refers to a translation method which gets rid of the constraint of the original form and conveys the content of the original text. Where literal translation will cause misunderstanding of the cultural message or create unreadable target language version, we must use free translation method. For example:

(1) For next generation (Pepsi Cola).

Chinese Version: 新一代的选择 (百事可乐).

(2) Every time a good time (McDonald's).

Chinese Version: 分分秒秒欢聚欢笑 (麦当劳).

These are all examples of proper translation, which has produced a very high degree of the cultural message. In such situations adherence to the word may kill the spirit of the original advertisement.

3.3 Combination of Literal Translation and Free Translation

Of course, both literal translation and free translation have limitations during advertisement translation. Therefore in the actual process of translation, it is often necessary to combine literal translation with free translation, so that the version can not only accurately express the meaning of the original text, but also fit in with the habits of the target language. The following are successful examples in this method.

English Text:

Instead of soap, try a whole new way to wash your face—Pond's Facial Cleaning Foam. It's a light, refreshing foam that cleans thoroughly, cleans gently, but doesn't dry your skin like soap.

Chinese Version:

放下肥皂, 试用一种全新的洗脸方式, 这就是使用旁氏洗面奶. 本洗面奶清淡宜人, 清洗彻底而柔和, 不像肥皂那样使皮肤干燥.

In the above example, the translator uses the method of combination of literal translation and free translation. If they are translated pure literally or freely, the readers will feel puzzled and the true

meaning of the original cannot be effectively transferred with a result cultural inequality of translation.

4. Strategies of Advertisement

For cultural reasons, the translator's prime responsibility is to realize the cultural equivalence between the SL and TL. Therefore, a translator's role is a kind of middleman. To achieve better communication between English and Chinese cultures and promote the cultural exchange, the translator should seek a true understanding instead of a superficial understanding of the two cultures. He must cover cultural distance, remove cultural barriers and overcome cultural bias in order to do excellent translated works.

4.1 Understand the English-Chinese Cultural Differences

As one translator said, "It is so much easier to translate if I really know what the text means". Understanding the cultural differences is the key to understand the text, such as the TL countries' cultural background information including customs, habits, religion, beliefs, modes of thought, values. For example, the English-speaking countries' culture is low-context while the Chinese culture is high-context. The Nescafe advertisement slogan "The taste is great (味道好极了)" is very welcome in China, but if the advertisement slogan is shown in the English-speaking countries, people may ask "How great the taste is?" The reason is that they emphasize the truth. For another example, Panda is welcome in most countries of the whole world, but in Islam countries it is attacked and rejected, because Panda's appearance is just like pig, which is regarded as a religious taboo. Therefore, the translator should understand and respect the English-Chinese cultural differences fully and choose the proper version in advertisement.

4.2 Respect Religious Beliefs & Customs and Habits

Because of different religious beliefs, English-speaking countries and China have different attitudes to the advertisements. For example, "13" is the taboo in English-speaking countries, while "4" is the taboo in China. Therefore, the advertisement translation should cater for the TL customs and habits in order to produce a positive association.

4.3 Cater for the TL Values

As mentioned above, the advertisement translation should also cater for the TL values in order to make the commodities accepted by the TL customers and enter into the international market. The Nike Corporation realized its cultural error and revised its advertisement slogan in order to solve the cultural misunderstanding.

4.4 Avoid the Negative Influence of National Modes of Thought

English-speaking countries and China have different modes of thought. The translator should have cross-cultural awareness and try to avoid the negative influence of national modes of thought. The purpose of advertisement translation should serve the TL customers' requirement, so the version should be reader-centered. The translator must realize the transferring of cultural equivalence.

5. Conclusion

Understanding English-Chinese cultural differences may help translators to understand the cultural message in the SL advertisement and use the suitable translation method in consideration of cultural message receptors and create out effective versions, consequently, promote the cultural exchange and realize the cultural equivalence. Thus, literal translation, free translation and if necessary combination of literal and free translation should be employed in order to realize the highest degree of cultural exchange and cultural equivalence. Nowadays China has more communications with other countries. However, there are so great gaps that people often meet some cultural barriers in the international business communications. The advertisement translation is not only a transferring of languages, but also a cultural exchange. The translators should make every effort to realize the cultural equivalence in advertisement translation, which may be helpful and significant to China's commodities entry into the international market better.

References

- Bao, H. (2001). *Cultural Context and Language Translation*. China's Foreign Language Translation Beijing: Publishing Company.
- Chen, J. (2008). *Functional Equivalence in Translating Product Advertisements*. Shanghai: Shanghai International Studies University.
- Cheng, Y. (2003). *A Guide to Advertising English*. Hefei: Science and Technology University Press.
- Fan, H. (2005). *A Contrastive Study on Cultural Connotations of Basic Color Terms between English and Chinese*. Changchun: Jilin University.
- Jin, D., & Eugene, A. N. (1984). *On Translation*. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing Corporation.
- Larry, A., Samovar, R. E. P., & Lisa, A. S. (2000). *Communication between Cultures*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Newmark, P. (1982). *Approaches to Cultures*. Dergamon Press. Hanvey, R. G, Oxford.
- Nida, E. A. (1954). *Customs and Habits*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward A Science of Translating*. E.J. Brill, LEIDEN.
- Nida, E. A., & William, D. R. (1981). *Meaning Across Cultures*. O RBIS Book, Maryknoll of N.Y.
- Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive Culture*. London: John Murray.
- Zhang, B. (2005). *Figures of Speech in Ads: Application and Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai International Studies University.
- Zhang, X. H. (2006). *Cultural Differences in Intercultural Communication and Implications for Vocational School FLT*. Shenyang: Liaoning Normal University.