

On Translating Advertisement Texts

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The purpose of my talk is to analyze the importance of the translation of advertisements, the specificities of this type of translation and the difficulties which may face the translator when rendering a S.L. advert into a target language.

To begin with it is worth mentioning that interest in this area (i.e. advertisements translation) is witnessing great increase. If in the past, very few articles concentrated on this subject, according to Mathieu Guidère ("Translation Practices in International Advertising"), in the last few years the amount of the translation of advertisement has become "substantial", and keeps growing. "The development of advertisements translation and mainly the difficulties characterizing it have made this type of translation the subject of greater inquiry and analysis. This is due at least to two reasons. First, because of the crucial importance of advertising in the economic and business fields, the translation of adverts has become a major tool for those developing companies and multinationals in need of new markets in order to promote their goods and attract consumers. Indeed as has been suggested, "advertising

translation is the means of communication par excellence of a company exporting its products”.

Second, the advertisement is far from being a mere body of linguistic elements to be translated into a target language, or a set of semantic signs that have to be rendered by equivalent meaning units. It is rather a complex structure where other items come to support the text in order to give it its full effect. Hence, “the translator who is asked to 'convert' an advertisement from one language to another and who does just that is likely to find himself in the unemployment queue fairly rapidly. “ Unlike the usual translator, the advert translator is an important element in the economic chain and is often submitted to great pressure. He becomes the agent on whom the success or failure of a business enterprise, more or less, depends. Given the complexity of the advert and its economic impact, the need for a specialized translator has become an imperative. Indeed " advertisements are designed to sell products, and selling requires enthusiasm, imagination and versatility. The translator / adapter in the field of advertising should always be aware that he is intermediary salesman”.

Adaptation / Translation

When dealing with the translation of advertisement texts one is faced with the strategy to be used in order to get the expected effect. These strategies range "from complete transference of the source text to the creation of new texts based on advertisers' briefs”. In her discussion of this issue,

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Joëlle Redouane, for example, writes, “ la traduction publicitaire, elle, est le seul genre à se proclamer ouvertement adaptation plutôt que traduction...La publicité ne peut en effet être traduite car l'énoncé n'est pas perçu en tant que tel. » Hence, in order to render an advertisement into a target language, for Redouane, “ il s'agit donc de ré-rédaction manipulative, l'essentiel étant d'accrocher le client... » Such a view is also shared in other discussions of the same subject which stress the fact that “the translator must conceive of his second – language version as an adaptation rather than as translation”. Matthieu Guidère, on the other hand, points out that “in 1972 an article by Pierre Hurbin was published in the journal Babel about the possibility of translating the language of advertising”. He added that twenty years later, “an article was published by Claude Tatilon in which he still hesitated between “translation” and “adaptation” of the advertising text”. The choice of the strategy to be adopted for the translation of an advertisements determined by a variety of agents governing the process, such issues as the economic profitability, the culture of the target language as well as the cultural context in which the translator operates, in addition to the difficulties related to linguistic untranslatability, may be crucial determinants.

Advert Translation and Economic determinants

Advertising is a complex business enterprise which aims at attracting as many consumers as possible and a large capital in order to insure the economic survival of a company. It follows that the translation of advertisements

is itself an economic concept geared towards the 'seduction' of new consumers and a means to lasting profitability. Hence, one of the major concerns in the process of the advertisement translation is the economic parameter which has great influence on the translator and reduces his freedom. This feature is embodied in what Matthieu Guidère refers to as 'the cost of the translation process', which he defines as,

The cost of a translation includes the
Financial investment necessary for
Transferring the message into the target
Language on the one hand, and the
Related investments, which are generally
Recommended by the publicity agent in
Order to ensure the success of the transfer,
On the other hand. This cost can be very
High and is only justified by a satisfactory
Benefit.

The translation of advertisement is, then, a risky adventure because it is not limited to language transference which may be covered by low investments. On the contrary, the language transference may involve a recreation of graphics and other audio-visual data that need huge amounts of money. As neither the translator nor the designers can be sure about the impact of the (translated) advert on the target receivers the result can be a ruinous one.

Advert Translation and Cultural difficulties

Advertisements are culturally loaded. They are often determined by the cultural environment in which they are created and present specific cultural elements that are designed to promote new products and attract would-be consumers. In other words the cultural specificities of the source language text play an important role in the financial success of an advertising campaign. With such features the advertisement translator faces new difficulties and challenges. Cultural references are a major source of problems for the translator since they often result in what J.C Catford calls 'cultural untranslatability', that is, "a situational feature, functionally relevant for the S.L. text is completely absent from the culture of which the T.L. is part." Hence, what may hinder the task of the translator is the vast cultural differences between the T.L. text and the S.L. text. Since the translator has to transfer a message which is culturally loaded into a target language he may face the difficulty of finding an equivalent cultural reference or simply run into an impossibility of translation.

Naturally, the translator has to find alternatives to overcome such difficulties or the 'cultural untranslatability' he may encounter and which may put his whole enterprise at risk. Since what matters most in the case of advertisements is the end result (i.e. economic profitability), the translator can have recourse to a form of compensation by finding analogous cultural references to render those untranslatable items, or simply to adaptation by creating a new advert which would comply with the cultural

expectations of the target receivers. Even with such solutions the translator is kept under pressure since the economic impact of the advertisement cannot be known (or judged) before hand. Hence, in order to lessen the negative effects which may result in the advertisement translation, the translator has to show great skills and immerse himself in the cultures and 'ideologies' of both the S.L. Text and the T.L. text. As he also addresses a 'message' to an audience through the translation of his advertisement he has to show abilities in communication and predict possible reactions of the target receivers.

Cultural features often lead to legal and ideological restrictions. The translator of advertisement may be hindered in his task, as he has to take into consideration such restrictions. Two instances illustrate this point. First, as has been suggested, in Saudi Arabia, the law regulating advertisements stipulates that "it is forbidden to show all or part of a woman's body except for the features of the face, and to make any allusion whatever in advertising to the relationship between man and woman. "Second as Ilze bezuidenhout points out, the opening of a McDonald's restaurant, 'a capitalist model', in China is a prime example of conflicting ideologies. Indeed, the transfer of the set of cultural values embodied in the McDonald's hamburger chain (America: land of the free) "impeaches upon the status quo in oppressive Chain."

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Linguistic Untranslatability

Like the cultural reference, the key-words composing the slogan of an advertisement may prove a source of difficulty for the translator. Indeed the problems that the translator faces in this case may be related either to the choice of the functional words in the target language or to linguistic untranslatability. Key-words are "the core of the translation. They color the text, give it the desired slant and appeal to the emotional sensibilities of the reader. "The difficulty arising here is that the translator cannot render these items by simply substituting them by equivalent items from the target language (i.e. Whenever this is possible). Hence, it is not sufficient for the translator to have a mastery of the target language; he should also be acquainted with the advertising jargon of that language. English which is characterized by a standardized advertising jargon provides good examples. According to such jargon, "cigarette tobacco comes in a light blend, not a mixture; shampoos do not improve the appearance of your hair, they enhance it; upholstery in cars is never made of imitation leather, but of simili-leather; if a product is expensive one does not give it as a present, one offers it as a gift. "The translator should then be aware of the versatility of the target language and explore its linguistic variations in his search for the "mot juste".

The key-words may be also a source of 'linguistic untranslatability'. This is especially when they are set in the form of a pun that is a play on words. In "linguistic untranslatability", as J.C Catford, put it, "the functionally

relevant features include some which are in fact formal features of the language of the S.L. text. If the T.L. has no formally corresponding features, the text, or the item, is (relatively) untranslatable. "A typical instance is the slogan of the following French advertisement which praises the merits of a salmon produce called CRU: "CRU SE MANGE AUSSI BIEN CRU QUE CUIT QUI L'EUT CRU". The difficulty in translating this advert into English, for example, is not related to linguistic untranslating this advert into English, for example, is not related to linguistic untranslatability only. Other features (alliteration, rhythm, etc) are impossible to render into the target language text.

Conclusion

To conclude my paper I would like to quote once again from Mathieu Guidère's important article on the Translation of Advertisement texts. In his statement on "the ethical stakes in advertising translation" he writes, "Translators are of course subject to the absolute power of economic logic but they must see to it that they do not reduce the scope of their activities and their chance of survival. Economics should not dictate what is relevant and what is not in the field of language and culture; it is up to the translator to affirm it forcefully, convinced of his intercultural mission... The translator does not need the 'advertising international' for his living, but the advertising international needs him to survive..."

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