

# TRANSLATING ADVERTISEMENT BETWEEN STANDARDIZATION AND ADAPTATION

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Advertising is a means of communication *par excellence* of a company exporting its products on a large scale. But the targeted effect of this communication can never be effective abroad if the message it vehicles is not translated. That is, without this prior translation, the expected effect the message holds is watered down and loses its impact on the foreign consumer.

But before embarking on such matter of translation and delving deep within its layers, it is of paramount importance to elucidate some clues of what an advertisement is? Advertisement is a means of communication and marketing of products for consumption. It comprises two major components: Vision and Design. Its dexterity is based on three major dimensions: social, cultural and psychological.

Viewed from a historical developmental perspective, advertising must be seen against the 'erosion' of traditional, social structures of meaning, which it replaces with ideals and images of privatized commodity consumption. "Advertising messages," points out Daniel Mayfield, "are reached in order to change the awareness, knowledge, and attitude of consumers towards specific brand offered"(par. 1). That is, the role of advertising is 'hunting' and 'haunting' the mind of the consumer and driving him to accept the product. This act, however, can never be done, if advertising does not take into consideration the role of emotions as anticipation, acceptance, surprise, joy, fear, anger, sadness, disgust and the like.



Emotional flow and emotional integration are two important constructs, which are tightly related to the portrayal of emotions in advertising. Both emotions influence the nature and intensity of emotional responses to advertising and affect, thus, involvement with the brand relevance and purchase intentions.

On the other hand, advertising is a form of social communication, which plays a complex set of roles within the consumer's society. That is, it manipulates culture and consciousness. "This approach provides insights into how commodities mediate social relations and focuses attention on the cultural impact of advertising and its multifarious social functions" (Leiss 231).

Hence, advertisers generate systems of meaning and identity by associating their products with certain life and styles, symbolic values and pleasure. "It is this sense that goods function as 'communicators' and 'satisfiers'—they inform and mediate social relations, telling individuals what they must buy to become fashionable..."(252).

The significance and power of advertising is, therefore, not so much economic, but cultural. "Cultural forms of social communication create meanings through non-discursive visual imagery, which come to shape consciousness behaviour subtly by sanctioning some forms of thought and behaviour and by legitimating others" (8). Commodity aesthetics shape to a large extent the values and perceptions of the consumers and could modify their behaviour so as to integrate them into the lifestyles of modernity.

What influence does this environment have on the translator's professional practice? How specific are translations done in this particular context? What criteria should be applied in evaluating these translations, and what value should we give them?

The term advertising translation designates all form of commercial communication and promotion, from a leaflet to a television campaign broadcast. The translator must be involved



at all levels as long as the advertiser is targeting a foreign market. Translation may be undertaken for a variety of purposes, but the ultimate aim of a translator in most cases is to achieve a measure of equivalence at text level, i. e., from SLT (Source Language Text) to TLT (Target Language Text).

The meaning, the message vehicles, depends dialogically on the way it is designed and orchestrated. Textual meaning, therefore, “refers to the way the text is organized as a piece of writing (of speech)” (Eggins 12). This function is described in terms of ‘theme dynamics’ and related to the ‘register’ dimension of mode. According to Ideational theory, “what gives linguistic expression a certain meaning is the fact that it is regularly used in communication as the ‘mark’ of a certain idea... A Linguistic expression gets its meaning being used as such an indication” (Alston 33).

All what the message holds is significant: it can denote and frequently connote an aura of meanings. It is “multiform [and] multi-voiced” (Bakhtin 261). Even names do hold meanings and contribute, thus, to the whole meaning of the message. “A name is a word taken at pleasure to serve for a mark which may raise in our mind a thought like to some thought we had before, and which being pronounced to others, may be to them a sign of what thought the speaker had before in his mind” (Hobbes 44).

The translator of advertising should know all layers of what the text poses and proposes. That is, what it folds as culture and ideology. Willis Barnstone states that: “The recoding of political, religious, and ethnic history its proper translation into other languages is rarely carried as a single information transfer. More often, such recodings serve as political, religious, and ethnic cheerleading” (34). The translator, who takes a text and transposes it into another culture, “needs to consider carefully the ideological implications of the transpositions” (Bassnett xv).

Good translation requires a good interpretation. And interpretation is determined by the nature of strategy adopted, or adapted, by the translator to listen to what the text holds as a



message, and to what the message evokes and suggests as a meaning or meanings.

The relationship between two texts is not content, “but a definable dissectible, and dynamic face-to-face of two cultures. This has the immensely practical consequence of narrowing down the focus of the extremely daunting ‘gap’ seen in a general and decontextualized way and of controlling the otherwise infinite developments that can ensue when comparing two realities, which, quite simply, are not directly comparable. Translation comes to be seen not as a culture-bound activity, but dependent on a specific culture pairing (Hewson 115).

Translation involves a process, which permits to look for similarities as well as dissimilarities of both SLT and TLT cultures, and points out the formal techniques that design their structures. Susan Bassnett claims that: “No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered to be representing the same social reality. The worlds, in which different societies live, are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached”(13). The translator should not remove dissimilarities, but, in the contrary, should solve this confrontation with an adequate equivalence, which overpasses the matter, yet, keep the spirit of such dissimilarities. Venuti Laurence writes:

The ethnocentric violence of translation is inevitable: in translating process, foreign language, texts, and cultures will always undergo some degree and form of reduction, exclusion, inscription. Yet the domestic work on foreign culture can be a foreignizing intervention, pitched to question existing canons at home. (310)

Adapting a message, or a text, is familiarizing and domesticating it. Thus, it becomes capable of giving the reader access to great thoughts to what is presented in the original. “Foreign texts,” admits Laurence, “is the site of many different semantic possibilities that we fixed provisionally in one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and



interpretive choices, in specific situations, in different historical periods" (18).

Translation of an advertisement should take into consideration the "socio-cultural context of language use which boils down ideology construction" (Zaquan par. 8). That is, during the process of translation, the translator should activate his ideological filter so that his translated message becomes acceptable and adaptable to the realities of the targeted country. In other words, the translator should localize what is global. I mean he should glocalize the translation of advertisement.

The translator should be a good learner. He should know the spirit of community, purchasing habits and the cultural background of the targeted country.

Almost every country in this world possesses rules and laws that regulate advertisement contents as well as their expression and their presentation. In France, the Ervin Act compels advertisers to use the French language exclusively. In Quebec, advertising posters have to be bilingual. In Saudi Arabia, the code regulating advertising 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 whatsoever in advertising to the relationship between man and woman' (Guidere "Adaptation" par. 22).

So the cultural parameters are important in advertising, and in targeting foreign countries, through translation. Companies, in the sum, have adopted one or some of the four categories: ethnocentric, polycentric, regiocentric and finally geocentric. These categories are closely related, on the one hand, to the overt as well as covert strategies adopted by companies in the field of marketing, and on the other to the advertisers attitudes towards the nature of the message to transmit. The translator critic Mathieu Guidere, however, relates those categories to the nature of the product. He writes:

The ethnocentric company adopts an attitude strongly linked to the original text and carries out as few adaptations as possible.



The polycentric company interprets the cultural specificity of each country by adopting its advertisements as best as possible. The regiocentric company adopts its campaigns according to 'regions' and not to 'countries—lastly, the geocentric company transcends geographic frontiers as cultural specificities by creating messages intended to be universal from the outset. ("Adaptation" par. 25)

Local cultures are very substantial in many countries around the world. Their relevance and influence are very essential in encoding the message of advertising. Such fact pushes companies to localize the intentional advertising campaigns and adapt the company's communication to the specificities of the local environment of the hosting countries targeted by the campaign. This environment could be divided in several components to which the localizing translator must be careful:

\*The socio-cultural components: religion, ethical norms, social and commercial habits.

\*The politico-legal components: the nature of the political system, restrictions imposed on advertisements and regulations (as spirits and tobacco). (par. 9)

Multilingual communication is the outcome of globalization. Such multiplicity in communication is at the heart of any successful targeted message. The prerequisites of such success are summed up in the following points:

1-Managing cultural differences.

2-Culture is global: culture is defined as culture of a transitional group of consumers having the same life style and similar consumption habits.

3-We have the point of view of the advertisement translator, localized. As

linguistic and cultural go between, translators are, by principle, in a mediation position that allows them to see the problem from the conciliatory and flexible angle of interculturality.

Globalising the local or localizing the global (Glocalisation) consists of adapting the campaigns communication. In this context, the translator plays a key role in the adaptation of the communication campaign. Here are some illustrative intricacies in advertising:

The first example is the ads of the Italian perfume “Tuxany” in French and Arabic: The complexity of the female attitude in the French is paralleled with the feigned playfulness of the character in Arabic. In the French version, the woman *turns* her eyes towards the family and in Arabic she *turns* her eyes away of the young men in the background. And yet, it is the same character, the same smile and the same look; only the angle of shooting has been changed completely altering thus the global meaning of the message (par. 20).

The second example is the ads of the luxurious Watches “Tissot” in French and Arabic:

- “Blue planet” in French.
- “Our mother, the earth” in Arabic.

The word ‘citizen’ is replaced in Arabic translation by ‘inhabitant’ in order to neutralize the political dimension. (“We are all citizens of the blue planet”) that could irritate some nationalistic regimes (par. 23)

The third example is the ads of perfume “Pôeme”” by Lancôme in French and English:

\*French: “You are the sun that rises to my head.”

\*English: “You are the sea, you cradle the stars.”

These concrete examples show that those linguistic differences are results of culture differences between languages.

What is noticeable in this context is that the art of translator/localizer consists of pushing as far as possible to the



cultural *mimesis* of the TLT without losing however the identity of the original message. "The advertising message," claims Guidere, "is not conveyed in the creative loneliness of the translator. It belongs in the confined world of advertising and the larger world of communication" (par. 7). Translation not only is part of a specific channel transfer, it has become progressively an economic concept.

Adaptation affects not only linguistic dimension of communication, but also some other essential aspects which are often difficult to adopt, and therefore very expensive.

The cultural dimension is the legacy of adaptation. It offers a gamut of parameters, which determine the environment in which the translator of advertising operates. Culture is to be understood as an effective context in which the translated advertising message is conceived.

Globalizing an advertisement is translating it to the other but keeping at the same time the meaning and the dynamics of the original text.

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