A Study of English-Chinese Translation Methods for Cosmetic Advertising

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Advertisement is an action or form of communication in the market whose purpose is to inform potential customers about products and services and how to obtain and use them. However, English and Chinese advertisements have different forms and characteristics due to the influence of some factors such as their distinct language and culture. This study analyzes the characteristics of advertising language based on some typical examples of cosmetic advertising at home and abroad. The findings show that four methods of English-Chinese advertising translation are commonly used namely transliteration, literal translation, free translation and supplementary translation. These findings contribute to our knowledge in cosmetic advertising translation and are of practical significance for relevant research in the future.

Keywords: E-C translation methods, cosmetic advertising, advertisement translation

Introduction

An advertisement is a bridge for companies and consumers to communicate. The significance of advertisements in marketing at home and abroad is evident, which gives birth to advertisement translation. Studies on advertisement translation have been flourished since the 1980s. High-quality translation of cosmetics contributes to boosting its sales in the world. In a bid to make advertisements more readable and preferable for Chinese people and foreigners, it is indispensable to do certain research on advertisement translation. Realizing the importance of advertisement translation, the author, like many previous scholars and learners, writes this thesis for the purpose of having a rudimentary knowledge of cosmetic advertisement translation. This study aims to fascinate scholars who cope with the problems in the relevant field and supply some inspiration to them for English-Chinese translation for cosmetic advertising. Only while apprehending both Chinese and foreign cultural differences and applying appropriate translation methods does a translator have the capacity to translate cosmetic advertisements, thus achieving the purpose of promotion.

Features of Cosmetic Advertising

Each advertisement strives to achieve the best publicity effect in a limited time and space. The ultimate purpose of the advertisement is to attract readers’ attention on the products and encourage them to buy. Therefore,
simple sentences and omitted sentences are naturally favored. On the other hand, for the sake of capturing the curiosity of women, the biggest consumer group of cosmetic advertising, a large number of cosmetic companies often use novel words with conspicuous prefixes in cosmetic advertisements to describe the efficacy of products, such as anti-, super-. The moment consumers see these words, they are likely to think about the originality of the product. The use of original and consumer-understandable words greatly enhances the popularity of the advertisement.

A phenomenon in daily life is that cosmetic advertisements are usually statements which can effectively trigger women’s buying psychology. Two types of sentences are listed in the following text. From that, it is not difficult to find that companies have taken advantage of their attachment mentality.

Interrogative sentences are frequently used in English cosmetic advertising, which require people to answer certain questions. This will make consumers think about the problem to arouse their interest and curiosity in the product and leave a deep impression. In addition, the vast majority of consumers of cosmetics are women. Normally, when making decisions, they often show an indecisive and uncertain psychological tendency. Interrogative sentences just fit their mental characteristics and help to attract a mass of female consumers.

In order to achieve the purpose of promotion, advertising should try to use encouraging language to enhance the function of persuasion. Imperative sentences just have the function of asking, calling and advising someone to do something, so they are often used in advertising. An imperative sentence is always short in structure, and sounds powerful when people read it. Therefore, the use of imperative sentences in cosmetic advertisements can make a deeper impression on those consumers and strengthen the tone of advertisements with strong emotions.

Most English cosmetic advertisements are both simple and easy to comprehend. The rudimentary vocabulary and sentence patterns applied in cosmetic advertisements help readers have a better understanding of these advertisements and can also expand consumers on scale. As the main consumers of cosmetics advertisements are women, translators of advertisements need to grasp the characteristics of women’s speech and psychology. While translating these advertisements, the translator must take these characteristics into account. In terms of vocabulary, the vocabulary should be congruent with the characteristics of women’s language, simplicity and affinity.

**Definition of Translation Method**

A method is a way of doing something, especially in a systematic way. The translation method is the specific pathways, steps and means taken in translation activities to achieve particular translation purposes (Xiong, 2014). Which translation method to use is not arbitrary. Actually, it is based on certain principles or solutions. That is to say, it is based on certain translation strategies. Translation strategy is divided into foreignization and domestication. These two kinds of strategies include several translation methods respectively. The former contains zero translation, transliteration, word-for-word translation and literal translation while the latter involves free translation, supplementary translation, variation translation and recreation. In the following part, four kinds of translation methods that are more commonly used are introduced.

Transliteration refers to the translation of foreign words by using similar Chinese characters in the target language according to pronunciation characteristics (Wang, 2011). This type of Chinese character used for
transliteration no longer has its own original meaning, and only retains its pronunciation and writing form. Many well-known cosmetic brands use transliteration and have achieved high recognition and acceptance in the market.

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 (Wang & Li, 2012). Therefore, literal translation is the most effective way of enriching TL and its culture.

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 (Cui & Zhao, 2016; Cui, 2021). Under the premise of ensuring that the original content is followed, the translated text is more in line with readers’ reading habits and aesthetic sentiments. When literal translation is difficult to express the characteristics of cosmetics, translators should consider free translation methods. On the basis of the original name, the translator finally creates a new version according to the brand connotation, cultural factors and various other factors, which reflect the brand’s connotation and form. Free translation is different from literal translation. It is not restricted to the form of the original text, but it can also express the meaning of the original text correctly. Cosmetic slogan translation should consider consumer aesthetics and cultural background of the target country and use free translation to translate so as to attract consumers’ attention.

Supplementary translation, which is a part of imitation, refers to adding words, phrases, or sentences according to different thinking modes and language habits in English and Chinese (Sun & Yang, 2010). This can express the meaning of the original text more accurately and make it easier for consumers to accept. The translation of cosmetic advertisements should not just cater to consumers in the target countries. It needs to combine the connotation and characteristics of cosmetics to find translation methods that are consistent with the habits of consumers in target languages.

Translation Methods Used in Cosmetic Advertising

Facing a highly competitive cosmetic market, cosmetic advertising is crucial to product sales. Cosmetic advertising translation is of great significance to the success of foreign brands in entering the Chinese market. With the aim of fascinating consumers, a variety of translation methods have been employed in cosmetic advertising. Among them, transliteration, literal translation, free translation, and supplementary translation are four types of methods that are most commonly used in cosmetics advertisement translation.

Transliteration

Generally speaking, transliteration is based on the pronunciation of the original text which aims to find similar pronunciations for alternative translation. Transliterated words can only be used together and cannot be split. Otherwise, it makes no sense. Here are some typical examples:

Example (1)

| Source text 1: Lancome         | Target text 1: 兰蔻     |
| Source text 2: May-bellline    | Target text 2: 美宝莲   |
| Source text 3: Swarovski       |                         |
Target text 3: 施华洛世奇

Transliteration is a convenient method to translate cosmetics trademarks in that the translated version is easy for audiences to understand and accept. Therefore, many cosmetics brands are willing to use this kind of translation method. Previously, while translating cosmetics trademark names, the translator often simply translated them into Pinyin. However, the translation cannot express the rich connotation and cultural implications contained in the original trademarks. The result is that those vivid and beautiful cosmetics trademark names become tasteless after they are translated. The above examples all use transliteration, which makes them not only simple and easy, but also easy to remember and understand. In the process of transliteration, attention should also be paid to the similarity of both the source language and the target language. In other words, the translator should try his best to select the most appropriate character to reflect the image of the product.

**Literal Translation**

In order to retain the original images as well as the exotic expressions in the target culture, a large number of cosmetic advertisements are translated into Chinese by a literal translation. Here are some examples:

Example (2)

Source text 4: The make-up of make-up artists. (Max Factor)

Target text 4: 化妆师的化妆品。(蜜丝佛陀)

Max Factor is a sort of professional make-up brand all over the world. Since the brand was founded, it has been favored not only by the majority of female consumers, especially young girls, but also by those senior make-up artists. Based on the notion of literal translation, the translated advertisement provided is similar to the original form of the advertisement. It is obvious that it conveys the main message of the original text and is not in conflict with the cultural environment of China. In addition, it also highlights the brand’s characteristic—professionalism. Concise slogans have made a deep impression on consumers worldwide.

Example (3)

Source text 5: Bloom yourself. (Mamonde)

Target text 5: 绽放自我。(梦妆)

Mamonde is a Korean skincare brand. It was launched in Korea in October 1991 and is designed for contemporary women who are eager to pursue themselves. This brand has attracted many new-age women and achieved unprecedented success by virtue of its constantly innovative corporate philosophy. It mainly emphasizes extracting essences from natural plants to make cosmetics. They believe in this way female charm can be reproduced. Both the word “Bloom” and “绽放” bring consumers the beautiful meaning of blooming flowers. This is completely in line with the brand’s skin care philosophy and brings the same feeling to the target language reader as the source language.

Example (4)

Source text 6: Your secret weapons against pores! (Benefit)

Target text 6: 对抗毛孔的秘密武器。(贝玲妃)

Benefit is attractive and innovative because it is the first brand to propose solutions to skin beauty problems. At the same time, it is also committed to incorporating fun ideas into the product. The advertising translation method mentioned above is literal translation. Benefit’s products are full of fun, from packaging to naming, and
the translation is also riveting and interesting to read. In this example, the target language and the source language are similar in form and the source language information is completely transmitted, which can cater for the heart of Chinese consumers and achieve the desired effect.

Free Translation

A faithful literal translation is not sufficient in attracting Chinese customers to some extent because of the cultural differences. In order to integrate into Chinese culture, translators try to do acceptable translation by all means. Translators have the right to create some information corresponding to Chinese culture while the fundamental information of the source text is not changed. Lists are the following:

Example (5)

Source text 7: Beauty with a French accent since 1863. (Bourjois)
Target text 7: 始于1863——法式韵味之美。 (妙巴黎)

Bourjois is a world-class makeup brand from Paris, France. Founded in 1863, it has a history of more than a century. This brand has won the favor of many women and has become one of the few established brands in Paris. Its slogan looks particularly strange if it is literally translated as “带有法国腔调的美” following the original language. The original text intends to emphasize that the brand is from France. The word “韵味” has the meaning of “flavor and taste”, which is translated into “法式韵味之美”, which enhances its readability. Using the classical Chinese component “之” retained in modern Chinese enhances the psychological resonance of Chinese readers. That makes it correspond to the reading habits of target language readers.

Example (6)

Source text 8: Infuse your skin with real roses. (Fresh)
Target text 8: 玫瑰片片，沁融于肤。 (馥蕾诗)

Using natural skin care ingredients is the core value of Fresh. In the meantime, this company is constantly innovating and introducing more skin care and beauty products derived from nature. The above advertisement is a slogan from this company. Influenced by traditional culture, especially classical poetry, Chinese favor four-word phrases. The translated version contains two four-word phrases, which shows a symmetric structure and enhances the readability of the slogan. For female consumers, they can have an infinite sense of beauty, thus appealing them to purchase their products.

Supplementary Translation

Sometimes the translator uses supplementary translation method to extend the target text with the key words and foreground the connotative meaning of the original text. So the target text is obviously supplementary in meaning compared with the text. Here are some instances listed:

Example (7)

Source text 9: Everyday New Face. (Laneige)
Target text 9: 水漾容颜，清新每天。 (兰芝)

Centering on the creation of hydrating products, this kind of cosmetic is designed to make young women’s skin watery. The above translation embodies the combination of the brand concept and its characteristics. According to the principle of supplementary translation, the translator chooses two four-character words to convey the feeling of nourishment and cleanliness after using the product with words, which is more likely to
motivate psychological resonance among consumers. Using these two words makes the advertisement easy to understand. It enables female consumers to know its efficacy clearly and reflects the characteristics of the four-character form commonly used in Chinese, which makes it natural.

Example (8)

Source text 10: Maybe she is born with it. Maybe it is Maybelline.
Target text 10: 或许是因为天生丽质，或许是因为美宝莲。

This is the advertisement for Maybelline. Comparing the source target advertisement to the target advertisement, it is not difficult to find that the translator has adopted the strategy of supplementary translation in the process of translating. In general, when there is a word such as “because” or “since” in English, it can be translated into “因为” in Chinese. Nevertheless, in the above sentence, the word “因为” appears in the target advertisement. This makes the translated version more natural and closer to what the source language intends to convey.

Conclusion

This article analyzed the features of cosmetic advertising from some representative examples both home and abroad and found that four types of translation methods are frequently applied in cosmetic advertising translation. Transliteration and literal translation are two main methods, which follow the original text to the utmost extent. Transliteration is similar to the pronunciation of the original text while literal translation is “word by word and line by line” translation. Free translation and supplementary translation are approaches worth considering if the previous two methods are not appropriate.

In the process of translation, choosing the right Chinese characters is not facile. Considering that the purpose of advertising is to popularize and promote goods, translators should be well acquainted with the consumption habits of Chinese consumers. They should also respect the Chinese culture and customs. Only in this way can the language features of Chinese be skillfully combined with foreign cosmetic trademarks. In the course of translation, a high-grade translator should pursue literal equivalence and pay attention to the expected results in the eyes of consumers as well. The translation of cosmetics advertisements can take a relatively free form, arousing consumers’ desire for consumption and causing them to have the expected response.

This study on the characteristics of cosmetics advertising language not only helps translators choose the most appropriate translation method to express cosmetics advertisements accurately, but also have a profound effect on the creation and design of cosmetics advertising in the future.

References


