

Research on the Chinese Translation of Brand Advertisements from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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This study is based on the Skopos theory, using the translation of selected brand advertising slogans as examples. It analyzes the characteristics of advertising slogans and summarizes translation strategies to illustrate the research value of translating advertising slogans into Chinese. This research aims to help domestic consumers accurately understand the meaning of imported product advertisements and provide reference for the translation of domestic brand advertisements, thereby contributing to the development of national enterprises.

Keywords: skopos theory, brand advertising, translation strategies

1. Advertising and Its Language Characteristics

1.1 Definition and Characteristics of Advertising

According to the American Advertising Association, advertising is “paid mass communication with the ultimate goal of conveying information, changing people’s attitudes towards advertised products, and inducing them to act in a way that benefits the advertiser” (Cui, 1993). The term “advertising” means “making something widely known”. Specifically, companies use advertising media to showcase the appearance, functions, uses, and brand image of their products. When studying the translation of advertising slogans, it is important to analyze the language characteristics of advertisements.

1.2 Language Characteristics of Advertising

1.2.1 Conciseness and clarity

Advertisements are mainly communicated to the public through media such as multimedia, radio, television, magazines, and newspapers. They have strict requirements for time length. Therefore, advertising slogans are mostly short and concise. For example, consider the following two advertisements:

Examples:

- (1) “Accuracy makes brand.” (Suzuki)
- (2) “It happens at the Hilton.”

Although these advertisements use only a few words, they can arouse consumers’ curiosity. The first slogan implies “Precision and meticulousness create our brand,” and the second implies “Everything is available at Hilton.” Both slogans provide strong psychological cues to consumers and stimulate their desire to make a purchase.

1.2.2 Rhyme and catchiness

Examples:

- (3) “He laughs best, who runs longest.”
- (4) “Always listening. Always understanding.”

Both of these advertising slogans have end rhymes, giving them a strong rhythmic feel, a distinct rhythm, and a simple and memorable quality.

1.2.3 Skillful use of rhetoric

Examples:

- (5) “To the host it’s half empty, To the guest it’s half full.”
- (6) “Chocolate, like love, is a delight to be shared.”

The first slogan is from a whiskey advertising and uses a rhetorical device called antithesis. Both phrases use the form of “To the... it’s half...” In this advertisement, the contrasting emotions of the host and the guest are expressed—the host worries about drinking too much “empty,” while the guest worries about not having enough “full,” highlighting the conflicting perspectives and emphasizing the deliciousness of the whiskey.

2. Analysis of Translation Strategies for Brand Advertising Slogans from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

2.1 Applying Foreignization Translation Strategy

The concept of foreignization was first proposed by the renowned American translator Lawrence Venuti. Foreignization refers to the translation approach that retains a large number of vocabulary and phrases from the source language, allowing readers to closely experience the foreign culture. Literal translation and word-for-word translation are the main strategies for foreignization. Let’s look at some examples of literal translation.

2.1.1 Literal translation

Literal translation means directly translating the source text, considering adjusting the word order to ensure fluency and preserving the original meaning. Its greatest characteristic is the absolute fidelity to the source text.

Examples:

- (7) Original: Challenge the limits. (SAMSUNG)
Translation: 挑战极限 (Challenge the limits)
- (8) Original: Winning the hearts of the world. (Air France)
Translation: 赢得天下心 (Winning the hearts of the world)

Both advertisements use literal translation, which means translating word-for-word without adjusting the word order. Although the translations of both ad slogans are simple, they leave a strong impression and accurately represent the characteristics of the brands. The first one is an advertisement by Samsung, and the translation “挑战极限” (Challenge the limits) reflects the brand spirit of Samsung, which is to explore and pursue excellence. The second one is an advertisement by Air France, and the translation faithfully conveys the original meaning without changing the word order. The concise translation with only five characters effectively communicates the striving goals of Air France.

Examples:

- (9) Original: Born for the road, the road to the foot of the new Mercedes (Benz)

Translation: 为路而生，路就在脚下 (Born for the road, the road is right under your feet)

(10) Original: As long as there is a dream, everything can come true.

Translation: 只要有梦想，万事可成真 (As long as there is a dream, everything can come true)

The translation of the third slogan adjusts the word order to make the sentence more fluent. If translated word-for-word, it would result in a less clear and ambiguous meaning. The fourth slogan also uses the literal translation approach, fully expressing the original meaning and presenting a well-balanced and aesthetically pleasing structure.

2.2 Applying Domestication Translation Strategy

Domestication, also proposed by Venuti, refers to the translation approach that renders content from the source text into something familiar in the target language and culture. It involves adapting the original text by abandoning its structure and form, aiming to minimize its foreignness and create a translation that is more fluent and easily accepted by readers. Paraphrasing is an important component of the domestication translation strategy. For advertisers, the fundamental purpose is for the target audience to understand the product through the advertising language and achieve effective promotion. Therefore, the translation of advertising slogans should focus on the recipients of the translation.

2.2.1 Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing, when the translation obtained through literal translation is unclear or difficult for readers to accept, allows us to recreate the original text in the most natural and equivalent language of the target language while preserving the general meaning. From a content and linguistic perspective, it is easier for readers to comprehend and accept. From the reader's point of view, the translated text is more authentic and fully captures the meaning of the original.

From the translation of the various advertising slogans mentioned above, every translation involves paraphrasing, where the general meaning of the original is retained and the translation is creatively recreated. This type of translation extends or expands the meaning of key words. Paraphrasing considers the reader's perception, preserving the content of the original while breaking away from its form to achieve a vivid and meaningful effect. Due to significant cultural differences between the source language readers and target language readers, paraphrasing endeavors to align with the cultural context of the target language, enhancing readability, though sacrificing some degree of faithfulness to the original.

In conclusion, when the translation obtained through literal translation is not easily familiar to the target language readers, paraphrasing can be utilized to translate content that significantly differs in expression between the source and target language. While maintaining the general meaning of the original, paraphrasing replaces untranslatable content with familiar words, idioms, and sentence structures in the target language. This not only increases the readability of the original text but also facilitates comprehension for the target language readers.

2.2.2 Creative translation

The term "creative translation" mentioned in this paper refers to a translation approach that involves creativity. On the surface level, it may be difficult to establish a one-to-one correspondence between the original text and the translation. However, they convey the same connotations, which are widely accepted by target language readers. Thus, this type of translation is referred to as creative translation or "adaptation".

Examples:

(11) Original: Every time a good time

Translation: Every minute and every second happy gathering and laughter

(12) Original: On time, every time

Translation: Exemplary in punctuality

(13) Original: Sense and simplicity

Translation: Meticulous in heart, simple in form

(14) Original: We integrate, you communicate

Translation: We bring it all together, you transcend yourself

From the Chinese translations of the above advertisements, we can see that the general meaning of the original text can be correspondingly conveyed. However, the sentence structure and wording differ significantly, making it difficult to trace the traces of the original text. Even if we were to translate the translations word-for-word, it would be challenging to achieve complete equivalence with the original text. However, the Chinese translations can perfectly convey the intended meaning of the original text. For example, translating “Every time a good time” as “分分秒秒欢聚欢笑” (Every minute and every second happy gathering and laughter) captures the intended connotation more effectively than a literal translation such as “每时每刻都是美好” (Every moment is beautiful). “分分秒秒” is the equivalent of “每时每刻” after careful consideration, and creatively translating the “good time” that it refers to as “欢聚欢笑” (gathering and laughter) also embodies the Chinese people’s aspiration for a good life, appealing to the psychological needs of the audience and achieving the desired effect.

Moreover, “Sense and simplicity” translated as “精于心，简于形” (Meticulous in heart, simple in form) is unlikely to be translated back into the original text by most people. Similarly, for “On time, every time,” its semantic meaning is “每一刻都准时” (On time every moment), but the translation chosen is “准时的典范” (Exemplary in punctuality), which highly condenses the meaning of “every time being on time.” The two have a high degree of semantic similarity. Similarly, for phrases like “Good to the last drop” which signifies “最后一滴都好喝” (Every last drop is tasty), which succinctly expresses the meaning of the original text. Each of these translations is highly condensed and refined, with some rhetorical devices from the original text reflected, such as metaphors, parallelism, and rhyme. Therefore, the above translations go beyond the framework of the source language, undergo secondary creation based on understanding the original text, and demonstrate ingenuity in sentence structure and word choice, even surpassing the original text in terms of atmosphere and artistic expression.

From the examples above, we can see that creative translations, which are unique and break away from the sentence structure of the original text, freeing themselves from the constraints of the original language expression, show clever ingenuity. These translations not only convey the same meaning as the original text but also exhibit unique forms of expression. In comparison, the artistic conception of the translations is even more profound.

2.2.3 Concise translation

When playing video advertisements, the presentation of advertising slogans should be instantaneous. Therefore, the translation should be as concise as possible. In such cases, the omission method needs to be applied, simplifying the text to obtain concise and refined advertising translations.

In video advertisements, the display of advertising slogans emphasizes instantaneity. Therefore, the translation should be as concise as possible. In such cases, we need to apply the omission method to simplify the text and obtain concise and refined advertising translations.

Examples:

(1) Original: The original and still the best.

Translation: Original, the best.

This advertisement is a typical example of the omission method, capturing the psychological pursuit of consumers for high-quality products. The translation is short and concise, eye-catching, and easy for consumers to remember. The characteristic of advertising language is the use of simple sentences and fewer compound sentences. Such translations also conform to the specific linguistic features of advertising.

Conclusion

Under the guidance of skopos theory, by analyzing the original English advertisements and selecting appropriate translation strategies, the charm of the original advertisement can be expressed through Chinese translations, achieving the same promotional effect as the original advertisement. Research on the translation of brand advertisements into Chinese can also contribute to the study of the English translation of domestic brand advertisements, and both can develop together. Translators can produce exquisite and outstanding advertising words to support the development of national enterprises. In this process, translators need to keep thinking, be bold in being creative, and select appropriate translation strategies. They should innovate boldly and produce translations that are faithful to the original in meaning and expressive in rhetoric. If necessary, they can also use creative translation methods to enhance the text. However, due to the significant cultural differences between the Chinese and English cultures, the road of translating Chinese advertisements still has a long way to go. Translators need to continuously innovate, break through, and continue their research.

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