

# On Translation Strategies of Commercial Advertisements From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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In a highly competitive market, excellent advertising translation can better promote brands. By adopting the three principles of Skopos Theory, this paper discusses the E-C translation strategies of commercial advertisements based on specific advertising translation cases, and proposes translation methods of literal translation, free translation, paraphrase, and augmentation, as well as rhetorical methods of homophonic puns, aiming to improve the quality of commercial advertisement translations, enhance the publicity effect, and achieve brand marketing.

*Keywords:* commercial advertisement, Skopos Theory, translation strategy, rhetorical method

## Introduction

Advertisements are a special type of text that adopts the AIDMA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Memory, Action) principle to attract the attention, arouse the interest, then stimulate the desire, then let the reader form a memory, and finally lead the reader to make a purchase (Wang, 2013). Commercial slogans, an indispensable part of advertisements, play a vital role in establishing corporate brand image and shaping product image. If slogans are not properly translated, an adverse impact on the marketing of corporate products will occur. For example, “Just do it” is a classic slogan of NIKE, which was once translated as “想做就去做”. Although this literal translation seems to be correct, some consumers are worried that it may mislead young people, especially those juveniles who do not have sufficient discernment, and make them mistakenly believe that “doing it if you want to” is equivalent to acting recklessly, thus causing serious misleading effects. If this slogan is translated as “跟着感觉走”, ambiguity can be avoided. In addition, NIKE’s products include shoes, and the character “走” in the translation can echo the shoes. Therefore, when translating commercial advertisements, the appropriate translation method should be chosen wisely and carefully.

## Characteristics of Commercial Advertisements

Commercial advertisements are what commodity operators or service providers directly or indirectly introduce to the customers they promote or the services they provide through certain media and forms (Zhao, 1992). The core function of commercial advertisements is to promote commodities to the general public, convey service details, and show product characteristics, thereby promoting the realization of consumer behavior. Commercial advertisements have the following three characteristics.

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### **Simplicity**

Customers have limited information acceptance and are easily impatient with incomprehensible expressions. In order to quickly attract consumers' attention, concise language, especially simple sentences are used so as to implant product information into consumers' minds in the shortest time. For example, Nestle Coffee's "The taste is great (味道好极了)" and Maxwell House Coffee's "Good to the last drop (滴滴香浓, 意犹未尽)". These two advertisements consist of only a few words, but fully demonstrate the characteristics of the products, and convey the characteristics of "good taste" and "fragrant" to consumers with short sentences, which is a good promotion of the product.

### **Inducement**

It is far from enough to describe the characteristics of the product with simple sentences. In order to get consumers to purchase, the language of commercial advertisements also needs to be inducing, and be able to "persuade" consumers to consume inadvertently. "Buy one pair, get one free (买一赠一)" is a common promotional advertisement, which is not limited to a specific product. In this advertisement, the word "free" conveys the message of "free of charge" to consumers, making consumers have the illusion that "all products can be obtained without spending money" and thus generating a desire to buy. Another advertisement with inducement is Sprite's "Obey your thirst (服从你的渴望)". The "thirst" in the advertisement not only conveys the product function of "quenching thirst", but also implies that drinking Sprite when thirsty is what the body "desires", which can stimulate consumers and make them buy the product.

### **Creativity**

In order to make the product more attractive and stand out from a large number of competing products, some commercial advertisements will deliberately misspell words or create words to attract consumers' attention. For example, "We know eggsactly how to sell eggs (‘蛋’求拥有)". The "eggsactly" in this advertisement is a homophone of exactly, and it echoes the eggs behind it. "Eggsactly" is an innovative word, and its appearance has greatly attracted consumers' attention.

## **Three Principles of Skopos Theory**

Skopos Theory is a classic translation theory that emerged in Germany in the 1970s and contains three principles. The first principle followed by all translation activities is the skopos rule, which means that the translation must meet the reader's expectations of the translated content in order to achieve the best effect. The second is the coherence rule, which means that in the translation process, the translation and the original text should be coherent in both language and culture. It emphasizes that the purpose of translation is to enable readers to better understand the original text. The third is the fidelity rule, which is to ensure that the translation is consistent with the original text as much as possible, including the semantics, style, and tone of the original text. That principle is an important principle in the Skopos Theory, which emphasizes that the purpose of translation is to convey the information of the original text to the readers faithfully.

## **Translation Strategies of Commercial Advertisements Under Skopos Theory**

The main function of commercial advertisements is to introduce product information and attract consumers. Therefore, from the perspective of Skopos Theory, in the translation process of commercial advertisements, translators should grasp the principle of purpose. First, to ensure that the translation should faithfully convey the

meaning of the original text. Secondly, the translated text should be easy to understand and acceptable to the public, and the background of the target language should be considered to avoid ambiguity or misunderstandings in the translation. At the same time, the translation is supposed to be persuasive to convince consumers. As a result, translators need to adopt corresponding translation methods in combination with commercial advertisements to make the translation conform to the expression of the target language and achieve good publicity effects.

### **Translation Strategies Based on Fidelity Rule**

**Literal translation.** The fidelity rule focuses on ensuring the accurate transmission of information. Based on the translation goal, the translation should maintain a certain connection with the original text and be as faithful to the original text as possible. While paying attention to the principle of faithfulness, some commercial advertisements can be translated by literal translation. Literal translation

aims to preserve the sentence structure and rhetoric of the original text as much as possible, strive to reproduce the form, content and style of the original text, convert the grammatical structure of the original text into the closest structure in the target language, and achieve vocabulary correspondence. (Cheng, 2015, p. 189)

#### **Example 1.**

ST: And after all this time, you're still the one I love. (Cartier)

TT: 经过了这么长时间，你仍然是我的爱人。

#### **Example 2.**

ST: The most unforgettable women in the world wear Revlon. (Revlon)

TT: 世界上最令人难忘的女人都用露华浓。

The translations of the above two commercial advertisements are concise and express the meaning of the original text while retaining the format of the original text. The translation of the Cartier watch advertisement fully conveys the “时间” and “爱人” in the original text, retaining the sense of romance of the advertising slogan. The translation of the Revlon advertisement does not use any modification methods; instead, the expression directly conveys the meaning of the original text “最令人难忘的”，which can leave a deep impression on consumers. It can be concluded that the use of literal translation to translate commercial advertisements with relatively simple sentence structures can still restore the meaning and tone of the original advertisement.

### **Translation Strategies Based on Coherence Rule**

The core of the coherence rule is to ensure that the translation is consistent with the cultural background of the target language, the cultural literacy, and comprehension ability of the audience. When translating commercial advertisements, the cultural background of the target language cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is necessary to use languages that can be understood and accepted by the target readers. In order to make the translation of commercial advertisements more acceptable, free translation, parallelism, and homophonic puns can be used to make the translation better integrated into the language environment of consumers. Although these behaviors will cause the structure of the translation unable to be completely conform to the original text, it is easier to be accepted by readers of the target language.

**Free translation.** Free translation is used when there are cultural differences between the source language and the target language. When free translation is used to translate commercial advertisements, the translation pays more attention to the audience's feelings, which is conducive to promoting consumption purposes.

## Example 3.

ST: Time stands still. (La Mer)

TT: 鎏金焕变, 逾越时空。

In this example, if the literal translation method is adopted, the result is “时间静止”, which is plain and unremarkable. It neither reflects the characteristics of the product nor damages the aesthetic charm of the advertisement. This is contrary to the purpose of translation. However, if the free translation strategy is adopted, it is translated as “鎏金焕变, 逾越时空”, which adds beauty to the translation. “鎏金” means to use gold decoration to make the appearance shiny and bright, and “焕变” means to be glowing and radiant. The combination of the two conveys the beauty effect of the product in beautiful words; “逾越时空” also means “时间停止”, which is slightly exaggerated in expression, but it is more attractive to consumers than the simple expression “时间静止”.

## Example 4.

ST: Not all cars are created equal. (Mitsubishi Motors)

TT: 古有千里马, 今有三菱车。

This commercial slogan uses the famous saying of former US President Thomas Jefferson, “Not all men are created equal”. For Americans, they can understand the message that this advertisement wants to convey. If the advertisement is literally translated into “不是所有的车都是一样的”, the translation is stiff and does not sound like a commercial advertisement, but rather a simple description of a situation, which fails to bring out the brilliance of the original text. However, if it is translated into “古有千里马, 今有三菱车” by using antithetical sentences, the effect is completely different. The “thousand-mile horse” reflects the speed and superior quality of the “Mitsubishi car”, making consumers eager to try it.

**Antithesis.** Antithesis refers to an expression consisting of two or more symmetrical or corresponding words, phrases, or sentences. If such expression is used, the beauty, strength, and appeal of the translation will be enhanced.

## Example 5.

ST: Love didn't meet her at her best. It met her in her mess. (Hermès)

TT: 爱也许不会在你光芒万丈的时候出现, 而在你狼狈不堪的时候降临。

In the original text, “meet” is used twice. If it is translated as “出现” twice, expression duplication cannot be avoided. As a result, such expression will make the text less attractive. Instead, the translation in the case uses “出现” and “降临” respectively, enriching the vocabulary. At the same time, “降临” conveys the vigorous momentum of “coming from the sky”, which improves the grade of the product. In addition, “光芒万丈” and “狼狈不堪” correspond to “at her best” and “in her mess” in the original text respectively, which are similar to the original meaning, and both are expressed in the four-character form, which is a popular Chinese expression habit. The antithesis is neat and smooth to read, thus leaving a deep impression on consumers.

**Homophonic puns.** Homophonic puns can make language expressions more subtle and humorous, and can also deepen the meaning and leave a deep impression. When used in the translation of commercial advertisements, they can make the translation more attractive and achieve the purpose of promotion.

## Example 6.

ST: Apple thinks different. (Apple Computer)

TT: 苹果电脑, 不同凡“想”。

If the literal translation method is adopted, the translation is “苹果想得不一样”, the language is bland, and it is difficult to convey the original intention to show how extraordinary the product is. In this example, the translation is in line with the Chinese expression habit of using four-character form, and also combines the Chinese idiom “不同凡响”. “想” and “响” are homophones. This translation not only responds to the “think” in the original text, but also conveys to consumers the information that the product is special.

Example 7.

ST: We have been waiting for you. (Starbucks)

TT: 我们“豆”一直在等你。

This advertisement is very interesting. Both the original and the translated text use homophones. The word “bean” in the original text is translated as “豆”, which is homophonic with “都”, and shows the product type, coffee beans. In addition, the translation conveys the idea that the merchant has been eager for customers to buy the product.

### Translation Strategies Based on Skopos Rule

As the core principle of Skopos Theory, the skopos rule emphasizes that the specific context of the translation, the reading needs of the target audience, and the role of the translation should be fully considered in the process of translation. These factors together constitute the key elements that determine the translation strategy and behavior. Since English and Chinese belong to different language systems and there are differences between the two languages, in the translation of commercial advertisements, if the traditional “fidelity” and “equivalence” translation standards are rigidly applied, it is likely to lead to a stiff translation and lack of practical effectiveness, unable to effectively convey product information, and even more difficult to achieve the original intention of commercial advertisements to promote sales.

**Conversion.** Because of the differences between English and Chinese in grammar and idiomatic expressions, some sentences cannot directly express the original meaning of English in Chinese. Under the premise of ensuring that the original meaning remains unchanged, conversion can be used to translate the parts of speech of English words into different Chinese parts of speech in order to enhance the readability of the translation.

Example 8.

ST: Live well, snack well. (Snack Welsh biscuits)

TT: 美好生活离不开香脆饼干。

If the literal translation method is adopted, this advertisement will be translated as “好好生活，好好吃零食”, and the language lacks characteristics, and thus it is unlikely for consumers to understand the characteristics of the product. The translation obtained by the transliteration method is not two actions, but two groups of noun expressions. Among them, “香脆饼干” simply and clearly informs consumers of the type and advantages of this product, and the expression “美好生活” can highlight the nice feelings that eating this product brings to consumers, which enhances the purpose of advertising.

**Amplification.** Amplification refers to adding words that do not appear in the original text but are actually included in the content according to the meaning, logical relationship of the original text, and the syntactic characteristics and expression habits of the target language, without distorting the original meaning.

Example 9.

ST: So start your day with a bowl of Kellogg's AllBran or mix it with your regular cereal. (Kellogg)

TT: 用一碗家乐氏全麸麦片开启你的一天吧，和你平常食用的其他麦片搭配食用也是个不错的选择。

The translation of this commercial advertisement adds the subjective expression of “也是个不错的选择”, which sounds more amiable, narrowing the distance between the product and consumers, and further persuades consumers to buy the product. In terms of objective aspects, it has the same purpose of promoting the product as the original text. Without the added part, the translation is still able to express the original meaning; however, such expression would be an unremarkable statement that cannot leave an impression on customers, making it hard to achieve the purpose of promoting the product.

### Conclusion

Through the analysis of commercial advertisement translation from the perspective of Skopos Theory, it can be found that translation is a complex process, which not only involves the conversion between languages, but also involves Chinese and Western cultures. As a translation theory guided by the purpose of translation, Skopos Theory provides a clear translation purpose and evaluation criteria for commercial advertisement translation, so that the translation can convey information in an effective way. In the practice of commercial advertisement translation, the principle of Skopos Theory should be fully utilized, combined with the characteristics of specific commercial advertisement language, and the translation strategies of literal translation, free translation, conversion, and amplification as well as the rhetorical methods of antithesis and homophonic puns should be flexibly used. At the same time, attention should also be paid to dealing with cross-cultural factors in order to avoid cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, and ensure that the translation can be well disseminated and accepted in the target market. In the practice of translating commercial advertisements in the future, the Skopos Theory will be used to improve the quality of commercial advertisement translations to maximize the promotional impact of commercial advertisements and provide strong support for the international development of enterprises.

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