

Study on E-C translation of Brand names from the perspective of Skopos Theory

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Keywords: Skopos theory; the unique features of brand names; translation techniques

Abstract: With the development of the economic globalization and increasing international contact, brand names become more and more important. Based on the principles of Skopos theory, this paper mainly discusses the E-C translation on brand names in accordance with its unique features and points out that the cultural differences between the source and target texts are supposed to be given much attention. Meanwhile, some useful translation techniques are used to achieve the best business effect.

1. Introduction

With China's entry into WTO and the frequent international communications with the outside world, a great deal of Chinese products surge into foreign market which leads to fierce competition in the process of international trade. In this competition, more and more enterprises have reached to the common sense that one of their most valuable assets is the brand names associated with relative products. A good brand name can ensure great product quality for different customers, differentiate the product from millions of competitive brands, or stimulus the purchase of various customers. The brand name is of vital importance to a company, which represents the image and reputation of the enterprise itself. Therefore, much attention has been paid to the study of the brand name translation.

As a special type of practical writing and culture, brand names have their own features, which are mainly manifested into four aspects: principles, functions, motivations and cultural characteristics. The functions are informative, aesthetic and vocative in nature. The invention of brand names is based on three basic principles: brevity, novelty and readability. To perform these functions and observe the basic principles, brand names are culturally motivated and produced psychologically, commercially, and sociologically.

As for the brand names translation from foreign languages into Chinese, the following distinctive problems should not be ignored or overlooked.

1.1 Application of monosyllabic pronunciations in Chinese characters.

Because of the limitation number in monosyllables, many Chinese characters have to share the same pronunciation which caused uncertainty for translators to choose Chinese characters. Psorales is a case in point, it is the brand name for a drug, which was rendered into“破故纸”when it was firstly brought to China. Obviously, few Chinese people are willing to buy such useless thing and thus this drug sold rather slowly in China.

1.2 Different culture from different countries

Some brand names are loaded with cultural information, it is an issue of how to convey proper meanings and express foreign cultures in translating such brand names. For example, the brand name of a lipstick, Kiss me, which should be translated as“吻我”literally. But such literal translation will not be accepted generally by most Chinese who are inclined to be implicit or traditional by nature.

1.3 Different psychological demands in different countries

The translation of foreign brand names should satisfy or meet psychological need for Chinese people. For instance, Caterpillar Tractor Company in America chooses “Caterpillar” as its brand name. If it is put directly into Chinese, it will be “毛毛虫”, which would definitely cause confusion for Chinese people at the first sight of the name.

2. Basic Rules of Skopos theory

Skopos theory holds that translation is to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose. It holds that translation is a form of translational action based on a source text, and the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (or skopos) of the overall translational action. This theory is put forward by Hans J. Vermeer who once stated his general position in his *Framework for a General Translation Theory* in 1978, and explained Skopos theory in detail in the book *Groundwork for a General Theory of Translation* co-authored with his teacher Reiss in 1984.

As the superficial meaning of functionalism indicates, function is the foundation on which the overall theory is structured. In functionalist theory, the most important rule for any translation is the “function rule”, or the “Skopos rule” determined by Vermeer, which can be explained in the following way. Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose as well. The skopos rule thus can be regarded as: the perfect target text should be translated in a way that enables the text to function in the specific situation and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. (Vermeer, 1989: 20; Nord, 2001:29)

This rule is partly intended to solve the controversy between free and faithful translation which has been debated for a long time. In the translation process, the translator has to make his choice from at least two aspects, the purpose for which the translation is indicated and skopos to be applied. According to the Skopos rule, the translator must translate in accordance with some principles related to the target text. This does not mean that the translators should always reproduce the functional elements solely from the source text or target text, but to adapt the addressee's professional knowledge, responsibilities, and communicative needs to the translation, because it is the reader or the addressee, that takes the top rank and determine the Skopos.

3. Introduction of Brand Name

3.1 Definition of Brand Name

Brand name is a part of the brand that can be vocalized for the company. It is the most important element of brand because it often captures the key associations of products in a very compact and economical fashion.

3.2 General features

As a special kind of text, brand name has some general features such as brevity, sonority and novelty which will be discussed in the following part. Consumers, in fact, are not fully informed of the quality of the goods they bought, therefore, their aimlessly value of brand names, which stand for company reputation, will lead to uncertainty of the goods.

3.2.1 Brevity and Sonority

First of all, brevity is the most important factor for a good brand name. Brevity is manifested in many aspects such as spellings and pronunciations, because brand names will show a deep impression to consumers and it makes them much easier to be remembered. Secondly, sonority is another important feature of brand names. Sonority refers to the distinct syllables and pleasing poetic syllables of words, which may add to the memorability for brand name. Therefore, odd and complex words should be totally avoided in the translation of brand names. Moreover, words which remind people of good memories and feelings that should be used more frequently.

3.2.2 Novelty and Memorability

A successful brand name should enable consumers to differentiate the product easily by its name from their dreaming one in mind. A successful commercial name or its translation should be instantly recognized, and possess the power to command admirations. In the process of translating a brand name, we should make sure that it is easy to be recognized, spelled, read, memorized, and orally spread. An excellent brand name should be attractive and easy to be remembered in spelling, pronunciation and meaning. Usually, the brand name should have a creative structure, which can be achieved by different ways, such as acronym, abbreviations, initials, numbers, and parallelism.

4. Strategies and examples under the Guidance of Skopos theory

This paper briefly goes over skopos theory and the features of brand names. Then it analyses the characteristics and functions of English and Chinese brand names. In this chapter, it will discuss four approaches to the translation of brand names: non-translation, transliteration, literal translation, combination of transliteration, literal translation and creative translation.

4.1 Non-translation

As for the translation strategies, it is clear to find that the cultural orientation of the brand name translation is of great significance. Even in transliteration and literal translation, translators have to take everything into account, such as the target culture, etc. otherwise, problems will be aroused in the target market. Meanwhile, there are also some exceptions, when some brands enter a foreign culture, they choose to remain their original brand name, and this situation is called “non-translation”.

Non-translation suggests that some words using the Latin alphabet should be written in the Chinese just in the way they are originally in the source text. On many occasions, some brands are made up of letters, numbers, or combination of the two, after entering a foreign market with their original forms, for eye-catching and they are usually easy to be remembered. For example, “U2”, “Will B”, “KUHLE”, “G20, 30”, “why?”, “NON”, “ONLY”, etc.

4.2 Transliteration

Transliteration means to convert the characters of one alphabet to the corresponding characters of another. That is to say, we should translate the brand names according to its pronunciation. It is a very simple and practical way in the translation of brand names.

In order to translate brand names in the target language, more often than not, transliteration is employed. By transliteration, the most obvious benefit is to preserve the beauty in pronunciation of the source language brand names. Because of preserving the original pronunciation, the translated version may give the original taste to the consumers with the great enjoyment. For instance, French apparel is so well-known in the world that they are often named as the names of their founders or designers. Transliteration may be the first consideration in rendering these brand names. Louis Cardin is transliterated into “路易·卡迪”, Halentina Coupeau is “华伦天奴·古柏”, Fransition is “法兰·诗顿”, U E. Delure is “迪莱” and Pierre Cardin is “皮尔·卡丹”. Chinese consumers, seeing these transliterated brand names, would probably have the first impression that the merchandise is made in foreign countries. It would arouse the psychological demand of some consumers and encourage them to purchase greatly. On one hand, transliteration simply gets the Chinese characters from the pronunciations of the brand names. On the other hand, it can create background surroundings under the brand names. Sometimes favorable association of the brand names plays a very powerful role in entertaining the consumers and promoting the sales.

4.3 Literal Translation

“Literal translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original.” (Newmark, 1988: 39). Its aim is to retain the national or local color, the original images as well as the foreign expressions so as to

enrich the target language. (Zhang Peiji, 1980: 161). For the target consumers, it seems more acceptable and friendly compared with the approach of Chinese Pinyin. Literal translation is to translate a brand name according to its literal meaning. It is one of the primary ways to translate the brand names.

A great number of brand names are translated into another language by using literal translation.

Only if there are correspondent words in the target language, literal translation can be applied. Taking “贵夫人” as an example, it signifies nobility and elegance. So it is translated into “Fair Lady” literally which makes the two meaning match each other very well. Another example, the brand “雅致” (Pashm Sweater), would give people the first impression of grace posture and uniqueness on wearing the clothes of Pashm Sweater. It is translated into “elegance” literally, which can not only conveys the original meaning but also manifests the visual beauty of the products. Other examples such as “云雀”(lark), “playboy”(花花公子), all of these translated brand names are very suitable for their goods. There are more brand names suitable for literal translation as following: Lazy Blue Bird [automobile] “蓝鸟”, Dog [missile] “懒狗”, Wild Turkey [whiskey] “野火鸡”, Blue Ribbon beer “蓝带” 啤酒, Redbull [drink] “红牛”。

As the most ideal translation technique, literal translation is adopted to preserve the original images as much as possible. Translators should think deeply to find out what these English expressions really mean in authoritative reference books to minimize the mistakes in literal translation.

4.4 Combination of Transliteration and Literal Translation

In the translation of brand names, only the approach of transliteration and literal translation is very insufficient. Aiming to achieve the best translation, translators could combine the two approaches. It is called literal-transliteration. Literal-transliteration is a target oriented translation approach. In this translation method, the characters of the target language culture’s positive association are chosen. The translated brand names contain flavor of both original and target language in adopting this method. To some degree, though the translated version may have something different from the original, it has the same function as the original to express the profound meaning of the brand.

There is a sportswear called “FUN”, which means “enjoyment and pleasure”. For its Chinese name, it is transliterated into “奋” embodying the sound and the meaning of “fun”. There are more examples such as Mister (shoes) “名什”, Polaroid “宝丽来”, BMW “宝马”。

From the examples above, we could conclude that literal-transliteration is much better than the only use of transliteration or literal transliteration on many occasions. In using this method, even much attention should be paid in both the original and the target language. It will make better translation and bring more consumers.

5. Conclusion

Skopos theory is an effective principle to guide the translations of brand names. This theory requires functions as their original purpose in the translation process. To fulfill this requirement, all brand names must be translated culturally, accurately and seriously as well. Meanwhile, during the process of translation, the cultural loss and distortion should be reduced to the least with the translators’ help. Brand name translation should consistently keep the original meaning, signifying and introducing the high quality of the products. A good translation is of great importance to attract the interest of consumers. Translators must equip themselves with necessary professional knowledge, linguistic competence and moral responsibility to do all adequate translation.

Though functionalist approach may not be completely appropriate in dealing with all types of translation, it can be the general theory guiding brand name translation. The target audiences are usually the prospective customers of the concerned product. The study of target audience is primarily to study the consumer’s psychology. Consumer’s psychological needs, to a great extent, will determine the realization of the intended functions of brand name translation. Above all, the

significant point of brand name translation is whether it is easy to be accepted by the receivers or not.

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