

On Translation of Commercial Advertisements from the Perspective of Intertextuality

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Abstract. Based on Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, by adopting Norman Fairclough's classification of intertextuality, this document explains and demonstrates how to translate commercial advertisement texts (CAT). After a comprehensive analysis, this study puts forward three main leading principles for translations of CAT: duplicating, substituting and creating intertextuality context.

1. Introduction

Commercial advertisements always carry the day we're living in and influence, guide or even shape our purchasing habits, so its importance is self-evident and cannot be underestimated. As Stanton stated in 1984, advertising acts as an audio or visual form of marketing communication and is also a kind of message spread activity with its ultimate purpose of promoting or selling products. Based on this, it's concluded that commercial advertising has at least four main functions, namely informing target audience of the information of products or services, stimulating their sentiments, arousing their desires to buy and persuading them to take actions.

With the initiative of multilateralism and international cooperation, more and more foreign brands are considering to enter or are entering into Chinese market in the meantime when numerous Chinese domestic brands are going global. But reality does not completely accord with hopes, and the communication disorders caused by different cultural backgrounds always keep commercial advertisements from doing its job of promotion. As a result, translation of CAT is particularly important for breaking down business obstacles.

At present, many scholars both at home and abroad have done a lot of researches on translation of commercial advertisements, and the previous studies are mainly carried out in view of skopos theory, functional equivalence, relevance theory, consulting contexts and so on. These, to some extent, ignore exploration of cultural barriers mentioned above. However, intertextuality, focusing not only the original and target texts themselves but also the cultural systems behind the semantic communication, offers a new perspective for translation studies of CAT.

2. Intertextuality in Translation of Commercial Advertisement Texts

Enormous previous studies will be reviewed in this chapter in order to find out the relationship between intertextuality and CAT and then to seek for creative translation strategies in view of intertextuality.

2.1 Intertextuality

2.1.1 Origin and definition of intertextuality

The embryo of "intertextuality" can be traced back to the period when Michail Bakhtin, a prominent literary critic of Soviet Union, put forward the theory of dialogism and polyphony. Against the structuralism theory proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure, a eminent linguist of Switzerland, Bakhtin argued that texts, whether they were daily or literature, oral or written, weren't immutable and always tied up with both the historical texts and the texts created in the future.

Inspired by the thoughts of Bakhtin, in the 1960s, Julia Kristeva, a famous French semiotician, initiated the concept of “intertextuality” in her book named *Semiotics* for the first time. As Julia Kristeva stated that, “every text is constructed as a mosaic of citations, every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts” (Hatim & Mason, 2001). In her opinion, texts presented an open system between texts and culture. Afterwards, some further explorations on intertextuality are developed by many linguists and semioticians. Barthes(1981) was one representative of them and defined “intertextuality” based on his researches. From his perspective, all texts had the characteristic of intertextuality and every text had the shadow of other texts which were completely identifiable.

2.1.2 Classification of intertextuality

The classifications of intertextuality are not fixed. According to Kristeva(2006), intertextuality was divided into two latitudes: horizontal and vertical. Different from Kristeva’s, Norman Fairclough (1992) classified intertextuality into constituent intertextuality and manifesto intertextuality. The former refers to the relationship between one text and the surface features of other texts, and can be further divided into five categories: quotation, allusion, parody, blending and cliché. However, the latter denotes the mutually referring, borrowing and combining of the present and past texts in four elements, namely genre, paradigm, topic and style. The following discussion will be based on constituent intertextuality because CAT studies mainly focus on the relation between two or more texts from different cultures.

All in all, due to the scientific and pragmatic nature, the idea and classification of intertextuality has been enriched by a lot of scholars and employed in many fields including studies of translation.

2.2 Intertextuality in Translation of Commercial Advertisements

Based on intertextuality, a specific text is formed by quoting, borrowing, rewriting or extending other texts(Gerald, 1987). In other words, texts don’t exist in isolation and have a strong relationship with others. For this reason, knowing this kind of relationship is key to understanding the texts. Inevitably, the so-called relevance in a specific country is barely understood or always misunderstood by people living in other cultural systems with different languages and views of value.

As a typical text with a defined purpose, commercial advertisements certainly own the nature of intertextuality. This requires that translators should build a connecting bridge between source texts and target audiences through using appropriate translation strategies. In view of this, by adopting the idea of intertextuality and borrowing the classification of Norman Fairclough, this document will raise its translation strategies of CAT in the following chapter.

3. Translation Strategies of CAT in Light of Intertextuality

CAT are created to grab people’s attention during a limited time or on a defined space. Therefore, effective signate is needed in both CAT and translations of CAT, that is to say, the language or slogans, as the most high highlight part of advertising, needs to transmit its inner meme by using concise vocabularies and terse sentences (Luo Xuanming, 2014). Based on this, three strategies from the perspective of intertextuality will be illustrated respectively in this chapter, depending on different circumstances. More concretely, the first two strategies are employed when there is obvious manifesto intertextuality, while the last one is used where there is no manifesto intertextuality.

3.1 Duplicating the Original Intertextuality Context

The method of duplicating is based on the overlapping of two cultural systems that the source and target texts exist in. Although cultural systems of different countries vary in a large amount of dimensions, they sometimes share the same parts, for example, children in both western and Asian countries know the story of Cinderella. In this case, the intertextuality, such as parody, quotation, allusion and so on, can be retained.

Here is a successful E-C translation of an island advertisement :

Kangaroo Island—you can escape from the rush of life and become a modern day of Crusoe./袋鼠岛——你能逃避喧嚣的尘世，成为现代的鲁宾逊。

In this example, the intertextuality of allusion is reproduced in the translation because Robinson Crusoe is the crossing point of two different cultural systems. In other words, almost everyone in China knows Robinson Crusoe, so the duplicating of the original intertextuality can evoke the target consumers' association about the pure and green nature, just as it works for its local residents.

3.2 Substituting the Original Intertextuality Context

The method of substituting is employed when there is no overlapping area between two cultural systems. When it's hard for the target audiences to understand the original intertextuality context, a domesticating new one could be an effective alternative.

Here are two C-E translation examples:

Example 1: 高山流水觅知音，星河音响成佳音。/High mountains, running water:where is my bosom friend?/East, west, Xinhe Audio will be the best.

Example 2: 谁跑到最后，谁笑得最好。/It wears best that wears last.

In the first advertisement, the source text alludes to Yu Boya and Zhong Ziqi, two figures of the Spring and Autumn Period, while its translation doesn't use this parable and instead makes good use of the intertextuality of parody and blending. By using the allusion of Yu Boya and Zhong Ziqi who became intimate friends because of music, Chinese audiences can easily associate Xinhe Audio with beautiful music and involuntarily consider Xinhe Audio as their close friends. That would not happen to people in other countries who are not familiar with the old Chinese parable, so the translation retains the original images and imitates the English idiom "east or west, home is the best" to recreate a new intertextuality. The processed translation is readable and easy to remember, which, to some extent, can arouse the interests of target consumers.

The second advertisement promotes a tyre. The source text is parody of a Chinese old saying, while the target text is also parody of a English old saying "He laughs best who laughs last". In short, the two parodies are equally effective.

3.3 Creating New Intertextuality Context

When there is no apparent manifesto intertextuality, creating a new one may reach an unexpected effect. The following is an advertisement of a cream named Green World:

今日的风采，昨夜的绿世界。/Give me Green World, or give me yesterday.

The target text employs the allusion by quoting the sentence "Give me liberty, or give me death", from a well-mined speech addressed by Patrick Henry in 1775. Compared with the source text, the target text is better to attract target customers. BMW's advertisement is another example, in which the target text imitates a well-known sentence proposed by the Chinese chairman Deng Xiaoping "不管黑猫白猫，能抓老鼠的就是好猫" to make the language more coherent and intelligible.

The original text:

BMW had The 1999 BMW 7 Series and its closest rival:a side-by-side comparison.

The target text of Chinese version:

不管是黑马白马，领先的总是宝马。

In addition, with the widely known sentence, the advertisement of BMW is more likely to be caught and kept in mind by Chinese audiences. Generally, in cases like this, the translators of CAT, as the medium of communication, can consider to bring their subjective initiative, namely creating new intertextuality contexts in real practices.

4. Summary

Commercial advertisements act as the middleman, by which the text-makers interact with and convince its potential consumers. This function also serves as an important measure to evaluate translations of CAT. That is to say, if the target texts achieve similar or more esthetic effects and arouse psychological identification of its target audiences, they, to some extent, prove to be

successful and effective. In conclusion, intertextuality plays a role in testing the success or failure of translation and because of its nature of functionalism, the translation strategies of CAT should depend on different situations.

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