

# Strategies of Translating English and Chinese Trademarks

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**Abstract.** With the development of economic globalization, business is frequent between different countries. In a certain extent, the popularity of trademark affects the sales of products in the international market. Therefore, a good trademark translation plays a vital role in foreign trade. The thesis will adopt the research methods of combining theory with instance. Starting with the formation of trademark and combining functions and features of trademark, this thesis sums up the principles and methods of trademark translation in both Chinese and English, so as to show the language features and aesthetic standards of trademark. Through the study, people can understand the aesthetic differences between Chinese and western culture and conclude some useful skills which play a certain function in translation learning.

## Introduction

With the increasing globalization of world economy and China's entry into the World trade organization, a great number of Chinese products flood into foreign market and foreign products into Chinese market. Then how to make our and foreign products or commodities better understood and accepted and even welcomed by the consumers in the target market is the first and foremost matter to be taken into consideration. Consequently, it is self-evidence for their goods to have a good trade mark or brand name and a good rendition so to bear the greater advertising effect and promote their sales.

The development of international economy gives the birth to trademark translation. Nowadays, companies have been deeply involved in a fierce competition in the global market and well translated trademarks can help to build good product image among consumers. Therefore trademark translation has been studied by more and more scholars. Yet the previous study seems not enough to meet the needs in such a modern time of economic globalization and quick development. Moreover, there are many existing problems in translation.

- a. Inaccuracy in the translation of trademarks, which largely damage sales and reputation of enterprises.
- b. Many translators pursue faithfulness but ignore the culture taboo in different countries.

In a word, the purpose of trademark translation is attracting attention and seducing consumers to buy the products. This thesis will analyze various trademarks and provide different methods and strategies to cater consumers' taste.

The thesis is composed of introduction, main body and conclusion, which has five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the recent social environment, which raises motivation and significance of the present study as well as the structure of the thesis. Chapter two is devoted to a detailed description of trademarks, special objects of translation with unique features, in which involves the definition, functions, formations and language features of trademarks. Chapter three is mainly about principles of translating trademarks. Chapter four focus on the translation methods that available used in the translation of different types of products in a detailed way. Chapter five is mainly about the conclusion of the whole thesis.

## Trademarks and Their Language Features

**Definition of the Trademark.** There are many definitions of trademarks as following:

A brand, i.e. trademark, is a name, term, sign, symbol, design or combination of them that tells who makes it or who sells it, distinguishing that product from those made or sold by others. A brand name is that part of brand that can be vocalized. (Pride/Ferre, *Marketing*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1986)

The trademark is the symbol that one business body identifies the quality, specializations and features of product it produces or deals or the services it provides. Trademarks are formed usually which characters, figures or marks and are marked on the product, its packing, shop signs or advertisement. (《辞海》上海辞书出版社, 1929)

The trademark is the characters, names, codes or figures used by the producer or dealer to make his own product or services known to the public and thus identify them from those of other competitors. (《现代经济辞典》商务印书馆, 1981)

From these definitions, the thesis concludes that trademark is a sign of commodity packaging, trademark is used to distinguish similar goods and the composition of trademark is text, image, or their combination.

**Formation of the Trademark.** In order to attract consumers' attention, boost their purchasing desire, producers are trying their best to create clear trademarks. Actually, there are general rules in designing trademarks. Producers usually design them based on special persons' names (e.g. Adidas---sportswear, LiNing---sportswear, ChangYu---grape wine), places (e.g. ZhongHua---cigarette, Luzhou---cellar), plants (e.g. Spring Bamboo---woolen sweater, Coconut palm---drink), animals (e.g. Septwolves---garment, White Rabbit---candy) or other things. In general, brand names consist of three kinds of words: proper nouns, common word and coined words.

**Proper Nouns.** Many of trademarks with old history are proper nouns based on people's or places' names in reality, myth or literature. Such as Christine Dior (perfume), she is the founder of this trademark. Monkey King (shoes) is a hero from literature *Pilgrimage to the West*. The name reminds consumers of bravery and smartness, indicating that consumers wearing these shoes can go very far and fast. In a word, noun indicates that the products are of high quality and reliability.

**Common Words.** In consideration of the advertising function of trademarks, common words have more advantages in leaving designers more room for creation and selection. Using single adjectives as trademark can imply the properties and qualities of products. Like Delicious (ham) which indicates its flavor is good. Using common verbs as trademark is to vividly depict the function and efficiency of the goods. Like Whisper (women's sanitary tissue) which creates an image that a girl whispers to you about her secret. This name indicates the product is of privacy and safety. Numerals used as trademark is not rare and sometimes powerful. Like 999(drugs) which is easy to remember and 9 indicates lucky in Chinese culture.

**Coined Words.** A particular trademark can give consumers deep impression. And coined words can make trademarks be clear, attractive and impressive. Such as EX, this is easy to pronounce, attractive in form and inclines consumers to associate it with the words "excel" and "excellent".

**Features of Trademarks.** In order to translate trademark better, we should not only know the formation of trademarks but also should know the features of trademarks. And following features can be as reference.

**Brevity and Readability.** The feature of brevity sometimes is called "KISS" principle, which is the abbreviation of "Keep It Short and Sweet". It is the most basic and important principle above all. A trademark should be easy for consumers to remember as well as to pronounce. For example, a cleaning product company named *Proctor and gamble* known as P&G. It adopts the abbreviation form as the trademark for it is easy to read. While translating it, shortness is also considered. Instead of using "普罗科特-甘布尔", the company uses "宝洁", which is not only short in form but good in meaning as well.

**Conspicuousness.** Generally speaking, conspicuousness refers to the uniqueness and identification of a trademark. Trademark represents the product and image of an enterprise. In a

certain extent, it is a secret weapon in business to defeat the competitors. So the trademark in the market must be unique and different.

**Descriptive Attribute.** Descriptive attribute refers to the feature of sending information related to the products. A trademark is not simply a name for a product, but provides some information about product, such as characteristics, functions, properties of the products, can also be shown as well. Skin food, a famous brand name of cosmetics, It indicates the consumers that this product is a food for skin. While hearing the name, consumers are eager to buy it.

**Functions of the Trademark.** Trademark is a bridge between consumers and producers. Although there are many different brands on the market, but their ultimate goal is to sale up products. In order to achieve this goal, a good trademark must be able to provide commodity information effectively and to attract consumers. Therefore, the trademark must have the following functions: distinctive function, informative function, aesthetic function and persuasive function.

**Distinctive Function.** Distinctive function is the most basic function of trademark. Good trademark should let the consumer distinguish the same kind of goods. The names of the same commodities in the fierce competition just like the faces of people. The first impression can effectively distinguish between similar products from other competitors. In addition, from a legal point of view, distinctive function is indispensable. Imitating or copying other trademark behavior constitutes a crime. The same kind of goods also have different characteristics and quality, trademark can help consumers feel the difference directly.

**Informative Function.** Informative function refers to that the trademark must be able to provide some information for consumers. As an advertisement shall provide lots of information and the trademark itself is an essential part of the advertising. Without information, a trademark is no significance and value, and it seems that consumers will be incomprehension. Good trademark can provide target groups with functions, characteristics and value of commodities.

**Aesthetic Function.** Aesthetic function refers to that the trademark must bring aesthetic feeling to consumers. A good trademark not only to tell distinguishing feature, more need to attract consumers' attention, wins the favor from consumers. To reach this purpose, a trademark must be beautiful, which let consumer never forgets it. At the same time, the choice of a trademark should be given to the meaning of the word itself to create semantic beauty.

**Persuasive Function.** To achieve the persuasive function, or ultimate purpose of trademark, the trademark must have the above mentioned three functions. However, how to persuade consumers to purchase products from the trademark? Firstly, a trademark often tells consumers the value of its products. Secondly, a trademark should cater consumer psychology and persuade people to buy its products. In addition, it is no doubt that using name as trademark is very persuasive.

The above four kinds of function are closely with each other, and all of them are very important to the success of a trademark.

## **Principles of Translating Trademark**

**Confirm the Consumer Group and Select Accurate Words.** When manufacturers or sellers produce or sell products, they all have clear target customers. As a result, the pronunciation and words of trademark translation should consist with market positioning of goods as well as consumer group. Such as Arch (雅倩)、Ardor (雅黛)、Artistry (雅姿)、Avon (雅芳)、L'Oreal (欧莱雅)、Maybelline (美宝莲)、Belle (百丽). Their Translation is adopted aromatic, soft and elegant words with female characteristics, which cater women's aesthetic temperament and interest, thus these brands are quite popular with ladies. The cosmetics "Artistry" means "艺术技巧". If translator used the literal translation, it is little femininity and unable to attract the attention of the female consumers, but translating as "雅姿" is easy to let a person think of nobleness, which makes it so popular. The translation of Pampers(帮宝适), Johnson(强生) reflect babies' characteristics, which is popular with parents. Contact lenses brand "Bush&Lomb" is the name of founder. In fact, the trademark has no meaning, but it was translated as "博士伦" according to the Chinese consumers' purchasing psychology and cultural environment, because its potential consumers are

students who are advocating knowledge.

**Reflect the Characteristics of Commodities.** Different kinds of goods have different special specification and quality. Therefore, trademark translation must reflect the characteristics of the goods and promote sales. Such as these translations: Decis(敌杀死), Machete(灭草灵), Ordram (禾大壮). These pesticide translations are not only easy to remember, but also reflect the purpose and effect of this commodity. German's car brand BMW is famous in the world, and its Chinese translation is "宝马", which let Chinese people think of "千里马"、"宝马良驹"、"马到成功" and other beautiful words. "宝马" not only reflects the company's leading position in engine technology, but also cleverly combined with commodity characteristics of cars.

**Combination of Beauty in Sound, Beauty in Form and Beauty in Sense.** Trademark translation is a process of creating artistic beauty. Because trademark has the function of positioning and sales promotion, it should be easy to read, nice to listen, and easy to remember. So the trademark translation should have the combination of beauty in sound, beauty in form and beauty in sense. Beauty in sound means that trademark translation has beautiful melody and rhyme, give a person with acoustic sense of beauty to enjoy. Beauty in form refers to that the trademark translation should conform to the requirements of the words in the target language, and reach as far as possible concise symmetry, to give a good impression on the target audience. Beauty in sense refers to that trademark translation is exquisite, which can let the target audience have rich imagine and indicate excellent quality of products.

The most successful trademark translation model of combining beauty in sound, beauty in form, beauty in sense is Coca - cola in the United States. In fact, the meaning of name is a kind of medicinal plants in South America. This unique raw material has the incomparable unique taste. Coca-Cola is best-selling all over the world not only depends on its delicious taste, and it has an excellent translation. Coca-Cola was translated as "可口可蜡" when it is first introduced to China. And later translated as "可口可乐". This translation uses alliteration and different tone of Chinese characters to keep four syllables of the original name, and full of lively and rhythm. It is easy to read and easy to remember when repeat it., which let meaningless original word translate into a new name with rich significance. At the same time, the sound of translation makes people immediately associate it with delicious drinks, which achieve beauty in sense. The translation completely catches the consumer psychology in choosing and buying drinks. We can say that the translation's effect is better than original trademark.

**Adaption to Various Cultural Elements.** Samouvor in the *Communication between Cultures* wrote "culture is acquired by individuals or groups from generation to generation including knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, behavior, attitude, religion etc." Bao Huinam said: "language is the carrier of culture, culture is the soil of language, and translation is the bridge of intercultural communication." Trademark translation is information dissemination and exchange activities between two groups with different cultural backgrounds. So trademark translation should adapt to various cultural element.

**Adaption to Political and Historical Situation.** Due to different nation has different political system and historical origin, the translation will cause the target language of people and the government's great disgust. At this time, the trademark translations who want to be successful must adapt to political and historical situation.

Such as down jacket brand "北极熊" translation is "Polar Bear". The translation is not wrong but the translator neglected that the "Polar Bear" has special meaning in politics. It refers to the tsarist Russia, extremely easy reminiscent czar of feudal autocracy and military expansion and Russian invaders. In order to avoid misunderstanding, translation can consider for "White Bear". Similar example is Japan Paint brand "Nippon Paint", its original meaning is "日本漆" but translation is "立邦漆". Another example is perfume brand "Opium". The original meaning of the trademark let western people think this perfume is full allure, once touch it just like take drugs and hard to refuse. However, in China market, "Opium" translated into "鸦片" and let Chinese people remind of The Opium War which is a national humiliation for China. It severely hurt the Chinese people's national

pride. So this trademark is slammed by consumers and finally it is banned from selling because of breaking Chinese Trademark Law.

**Adaption to Different Meaning of Words.** Language is the carrier of culture. As a code system reflecting a certain culture, each language contains numerous words with different meanings. Some words are really beautiful in Chinese. They will have different effects and meanings once they are translated into English directly.

One lipstick trademark in China named “芳芳” in Chinese, this name is really very beautiful when we see these two characters “芳芳”. It is easy to arouse beautiful associations from the minds of Chinese people. It seems that we not only meet a pretty girl, but also smell the flavor from her. However, if this trademark were translated into English *FangFang* by transliteration, it would give English readers a kind of horrible feeling because “fang” is coincidentally an English word with the following meanings: a. a long, sharp-tooth of a dog; b. a snake, a poison-tooth. So the translation *FangFang* cannot persuade people to purchase or promote sales and exploit markets. In order to avoid this kind of misunderstandings, before our products enter the international market, we should know connotations of words in different countries.

**Adaption to Different Moral Values and Beliefs.** Every nation has moral principles and beliefs of its own characteristics which are regarded as unique to its culture. If a translated trademark is to be well accepted in the target market, the translator can never neglect the considerations of the moral values and beliefs unique to that nation and will have to adapt his linguistic selections to that aspect of the target culture.

As we know, western people are very bold and extravert in showing love. Compared with western people, most Chinese tend to be more traditional and conservative in talking about love in public. Actually, throughout much of the Chinese history, to control one’s feelings has always been seen as a virtue. For examples, “Kiss Me”, the trademark of a foreign lipstick, is popular name in western countries because the name arouses people the association of charming ladies and thus caters the moral values of the majority of the western people. But when the product is targeted on the Chinese market, one has to consider the different moral values and beliefs of the Chinese. Being well aware of that, the translator translated it into “奇士美” rather than “吻我”, which typically shows the translator’s purposeful adaptation to the moral principles and beliefs of the Chinese.

**Adaption to Consumer’s Psychology.** Consumer’s psychology refers to “the mental or psychological activities of consumers in their realization, adjustment, and control of purchasing and consuming actions according to their own needs abilities under the influence of the general social environment of consumption and economy”.(顾文均, 2012:47). A successful trademark translation is beyond imagination for consumer psychology, and will cause unexpected results.

As domestic export trademark “轻身减肥片” for example. When it entered the U.S. market, trademark translation is “Obesity - reducing Tablets”. The seller expected products to be very popular, because Americans generally pay close attention to their own weight. However, the sales are very disappointing. Through market research, the company discovered the reason: “obese” means “very fat (obesity, hypertrophy)”, which the target consumers are reluctant to admit and even contradict it deeply. In order to cater to consumer’s psychology, translation is changed into “Slimming Pills”, choose and employ persons’ love words “slim” instead of “obese”, and finally the volume of sales grow rapidly.

**Adaption to Different Associations of Plants, Animals, Colors and Numbers.** Different national cultures are different; its cultural connotation is also different. So the trademark translation should also fully consider the target nation’s culture, history and customs. In trademark translation should try to avoid words with cultural taboo.

a. Plant: The Chinese has profound national culture emotion for “plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum”, but the understanding of flowers has very big difference in different country, and then affect the promotion of related products in foreign markets. Many Chinese trademark named “榄菊牌”, “菊花牌”. Because these trademarks will remind Chinese of some good characters like persistence, nobleness, not seek fame and wealth. In western countries, however, things are different. In Latin American countries, people see the chrysanthemum as demon

- flowers; In Italy, people put the chrysanthemum as national flower, avoid using it as trademarks.
- b. Animal: Chinese love dragon and phoenix from ancient times. Some trademarks named “金龙鱼”(cooking oil) “凤凰牌”(bicycle). “Dragon” implies the power and prosperity in China, but in western mythology, it is considered as fire-breathing monsters, so in the west it refers to the devil. “Phoenix” implies grace and good fortune in China; however, it implies “rebirth” in the western, thus western people easily relate it with “start again” and “narrow escape”.
  - c. Color: Chinese love red, because it stands for happy and festive. Most westerners don't like red, because the “red” color is a sign of violence and bloodshed. So Chinese electric fans brand “红星” is cleverly translated into “Bright star” or “Shining Star” .
  - d. Number: Chinese lucky number is 5, 6, 8, 9. Some trademark named like “555” (cigarette), “999”(medicine), “金六福” (jewelry) . But the “6” symbols of the devil in the *Bible*. In the European and American countries, “13” is regarded as inauspicious.

## Methods of Translating Trademark

**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). Because trademarks are generally made up of one or several words, the literal translation discussed here refers only to the translation of the literal meanings of the words or characters in trademarks. Literal translation is the most commonly used method in trademark translation, which can convey original messages and feelings directly and accurately.

Some Chinese and English trademarks come from the names of plants, animals, or other objects which exist in the source and target culture. To some extent, literal translation is the most direct and commonly used way in trademark translation. Some very good example like “Apple” (computer) which is literally translated into “苹果”, though it has no relation with computer but it is easy to remember and loved by young people.

**Free Translation.** Free translation is a translation that reproduces the general meaning of original text. It may or may not closely follow the form or organization of the original. Free translation is rarely applied in the translation of trademarks, however, if used properly, it can make the translated trademark more easily to be understood and accepted by consumers.

We would take a close look at the rendering of “杜康”(wine). If transliterated, it should be put into Du Kang which have no actual meaning and only are combination of letters to the target language consumers. However, for Chinese consumers, at the inventor of the wine, 杜康, and ancient Chinese culture and furthermore to the super quality of the wine. What target version can make foreign consumers have the same or similar response? Final choice of “Bacchus”, God of wine in ancient Greek legend, undoubtedly is the best.

**Transliteration.** Transliteration refers to the way of translating trademarks by presenting or spelling the original in the characters of another alphabet. Transliteration is frequently used in trademark translation, because it can keep the original flavor of trademarks and express an exotic mood of the product.

The translation of Beijing company “四通” is very successful. Trademark “四通” translated as “STONE” which follow the translation principle of transliteration. In the source culture “四通” has multiple cultural connotation. It contains the meaning of “四通八达, 无所不能” in Chinese, not only symbol the tip of science and technology, but also symbol the broad market. In the target culture, the source cultural information is converted to a new kind of cultural information in a western business. “STONE” has the meaning of “A rolling stone gathers no moss” in English.

**Combination of Literal Translation and Transliteration.** Which way should we use in trademark translation depends on how well it can help to achieve the equivalence in function, especially in aesthetic and vocative function. In order to make a trademark best perform its functions in the target language, we often combine the two frequently used ways of translation: literal translation and transliteration. This method is often used when trademarks can find the

correspondences which have the similar sounds and the relevant meanings in the target language. And the translated trademark can also clearly tell the consumer about the quality, function and characteristics of the products.

A good example is the world famous trademark “Goldlion”. In western culture, the trademark symbolizes “intrepid, authoritative and fearless”. Its characteristics of the product cater the men consumers and stimulate their purchasing desire. “Lion” is regarded as the king of beasts by westerners. There was a book about Winston Churchill named “The Last Lion”, it shows the value of “Lion” in the heart of British people. If “Goldlion” translated into “金狮”, its partial tone is “金死”, “金失” which is the most taboo thing by merchants. The company in order to meet consumer’s desire for money and pursuit of luxury, translating “Gold” as “金利”, “lion” as “来”. This is the well-known trademark “金利来” all over China, contains the meaning of flowing wealth which has wonderful business opportunities.

## Conclusion

Our study of the current situation of trademark translation in China shows that there do exist many problems and the quality of trademark translation still needs much improvement. Among the problems in trademark translation in China, the most commonly seen and serious are resulted from lack of knowledge in trademark and target culture. Thus this paper firstly introduces basic knowledge of trademark, including its definition, formation, features and functions. Trademark translation must go under the guidance of appropriate principles and the most important is the influence of culture. According to these principles, the commonly used translation methods for translation include literal translation, free translation, transliteration and combination of literal translation and transliteration. In trademark translation practice, one should cautiously and flexibly adopt these translation methods according to different situations. However, none of these methods is almighty in all situations.

Trademark translation is a complicated work which involves linguistics, translation theory, marketing, psychology and culture, etc. As economic globalization keeps on developing, further and detailed studies on trademark translation from the perspective of the above-mentioned subjects need to be carrier on to meet the new challenge in this field.

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