

Study on the Translation of Trademarks Between Chinese and English

Ying Zhou

Foreign Language Teaching and Research Department
Yingkou Institute of Technology
Yingkou, China

Abstract—With the globalization of the world, many products in China are exported to foreign countries. Therefore, the translation of trademarks is necessary and important. This paper introduces the equivalence phenomenon in the translation of trademarks and some common translation skills.

Keywords—*equivalence; transliteration; free translation*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the world globalization, many products have traveled abroad and their trademarks need translating. Therefore the translation of trademarks is worth studying.

II. SOME FEATURES OF TRADEMARKS

At first, it is important for some features of trademarks to be introduced. Trademark of a commodity, just like a person's name, is a signal representing the commodity and spreads its repute along with exchanges of goods. Many famous international trademarks have become the invisible assets and tremendous wealth.

A. Features

Successful trademarks are unavoidably composed of the following features:

- They must conform to the characteristics of goods.
- They should possess the symbolic meaning, which people can easily associate with.
- They should be easy to memorize.
- They should be easy to read.

B. Functions

Generally speaking, they have the following functions:

- To attract customers;
- To facilitate people in recognizing the merchandize;
- To make people associate them with the goods;
- To advertise the goods.

III. THE EQUIVALENT PHENOMENON

It has sometimes been said that the overriding purpose of any translation should be to achieve “equivalent effect”, i.e. to produce the same effect (or one as close as possible) on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original. (This is also called the “equivalent response” principle. Nida calls it “dynamic equivalence.”)

A. The Cultural Equivalence

Culture as a social ideology permeates into many aspects of modern world. The formation of trademark words is also influenced by culture. Trademarks are formed either by words or pictures or the both. No matter what they are composed of, they all convey certain information. When they are formed by words, it is more likely they contain cultural information because language is a part of culture. Words of trademarks can reflect the long history and culture of a nation. Since they contain rich culture, the conveying of cultural information must be paid special attention to when it comes to trademark translation. Translators must lay special emphasis on cultural equivalence. And the final goal of cultural equivalence is to make readers of the original and readers of the translated have the same responses. The key difference between Chinese and western culture can cause the loss of cultural information in the process of translation and different responses between readers of the original and the translated. The following are some examples:

Chinese people sometimes like choosing the names of flowers and grass as trademarks, but the symbolism of flowers is not easy to be equivalent because of the difference between cultures. Take Chinese men's clothes called “紫罗兰” as an example, if “Pansy” is taken as a trademark; the clothes won't sell well because “Pansy” means womanlike man in English. It's not hard to imagine the sales of the clothes. The famous Chinese wine “杜康” is well known to every Chinese but if translated into English as “Dukang”, the trademark can only remind people of a wine but the information that Dukang is an outstanding expert on brewing wine is failed to convey. And foreigners cannot think of good wine when they mention “Dukang” as Chinese people do. So “Dukang” as a trademark fails to make cultural information completely equivalent. However, if the name Bacchus, the God of wine in Greek, is employed

as a trademark, more cultural information will be conveyed and it is much better than “Dukang” because Bacchus can make westerners connect in their minds with more related information. “Nike” is a well — known sports trademark which can remind westerners of victory and luck because Nike is a Goddess of Victory in Greek fable .It is said that Nike has two wings and holds olive branches and brings victory and gifts of Gods to people. She is the symbol of luck, justice and beauty. “Nike” can be translated into “耐克” in Chinese, which implies that the products can last long and facilitate users in beating opponents in the match. “Nike” is indeed a good translation but the English word Nike’s connotation cannot possibly be completely conveyed because of cultural differences.

The culture of a country is based on its special customs. Chinese trademark “杏花村” which is a name of a village can make Chinese people think of the ancient wine culture and the famous poem “借问酒家何处有, 牧童遥指杏花村”. (the poem means a stranger asked for the place of a wine shop and a shepherd boy pointed to the remote village called Xinghuacun). Because of the village Xinghuacun’s special relation to the culture, it’s not easy to translate it into English without losing any cultural information. In fact, cultural equivalence is not easy to achieve even though we try to do that.

B. Dynamic Equivalence

According to Nida’s theory, translating means communicating, and this process depends on what is received by persons hearing or reading a translation. Judging the validity of a translation cannot stop with a comparison of corresponding lexical meanings, grammatical classes, and rhetorical devices. What is important is the extent to which receptors correctly understand and appreciate the translated text.” For example, “Polaroid” is the trademark of one type of American cameras. Please look at the following translations: “宝来得” “宝丽得” “波拉罗伊德” 和 “拍立得”. Among all these translations, “拍立得” is the best one because cameras are used for taking photos and “拍” means that. One of “Polaroid” cameras’ features is that photos will come out if people wait only a short time, which means “立得” in Chinese. So “拍立得” can not only remind people of the product but also the feature of the camera.

The purpose of translating trademarks is to make customers understand, familiarize and then accept the product. Trademarks have the effect of propaganda. From the point of marketing, trademarks’ readers are potential customers, so translators should start from the point of readers and consider if the translated trademark can be understood and accepted .So we say dynamic equivalence is prior to formal equivalence. For example, French perfume “Poison” is a famous international brand .When it was decided to be the trademark, risks had been taken into consideration. Because “Poison” means “毒药”, generally speaking, who dare make oneself fragrant with poison? However, “Poison” perfume achieved a big success at last. In that case, can it be directly translated into “毒药” in Chinese? The answer is of course negative. Because of the feature of perfume and the purpose of marketing, the method of

dynamic equivalence can be employed. Someone translated it into “百爱神”. This is an acceptable translation. When Chinese trademarks are translated into English ones, dynamic equivalence should also be adopted. For example, Chinese dry battery “白象” can be translated into “White Elephant” literally. But “White Elephant” is a fixed phrase which means burdensome possession or useless things. So this translation cannot be used. It can be translated into “Brown Lion” which has the same connotation with “白象” in Chinese and both represent strong power. And Chinese film “乐凯” is translated into “Lucky” in English .Although “乐凯” and “Lucky” doesn’t have the same meaning literally, “Lucky” can be regarded as a good translation because “Lucky” reminds people of good fortune. Customers must welcome the film, which can bring good fortune. Guangdong — made oral liquids “太阳神” is the same. “太阳神” was not translated into “Sun” but “Apollo” was adopted. From the form, it seems there is no equivalence but “Apollo” can be said to be the best translation because Apollo is a God mastering brightness, youth, and medicine in Greek fable and is a handsome man. So people in England naturally relate the product with Apollo. Drinking the product can make life bright and people vigorous. Men can become handsome after drinking the product. The markets of “Apollo” are evident. So “Apollo” is a good example of dynamic equivalence.

IV. COMMON TECHNIQUES IN THE TRANSLATION OF TRADEMARKS

Trademarks play a role of promoting products. They are of great importance to attract customers. In a word, both their forms and meanings must make a fine impression on customers. So in translating them, the choice of words is very important. No matter what words are chosen, they must be words which can remind people of good things like luck, fortune, health, love and so on. There are several techniques to translate trademarks. In general, there are four methods: transliteration, free translation, combination of the first two methods, and flexible translation.

A. Transliteration

When trademarks are proper nouns like names of people or places or some fabricated words, the method of transliteration is often used because these words have little meanings themselves. A good example is “功夫” shoes, is translated into “Gongfu” because Gongfu films and TV plays have been famous all over the world. The translation of “功夫”, “Gongfu” has become a loanword of English. So it can be easily accepted as a trademark in English-speaking countries. Totally equivalent transliteration is very difficult. Transliteration is only to find the same or similar words in target language with the original language. These translations are totally done according to the original ones’ pronunciation and neither can the products’ features be seen from the translation nor do they have practical meanings. For example in “Table I”:

TABLE I. EXAMPLES OF TRANSLITERATION

| English | Chinese |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Kodak (film) | 柯达 |
| Casio(electronic organ) | 卡西欧 |
| Rolex(watch) | 劳力士 |
| Lipton(black tea) | 立顿 |
| Lincoln(car) | 林肯 |
| Heinz(rice flour) | 享乐 |
| Huawei(mobile phone) | 华为 |
| Parker(pen) | 派克 |
| Watson (electronic fan) | 华生 |
| Changhong (TV set) | 长虹 |
| Chunlan (air conditioner) | 春兰 |
| Lining (sportswear) | 李宁 |
| Yizhichun (dress) | 一支春 |

B. Free Translation

Free translation requires that the meaning of the translated trademark should be same or similar with the original one or can remind people of the product. The following are examples of free translation in “Table II”.

TABLE II. EXAMPLES OF FREE TRANSLATION

| English | Chinese |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Shell(petroleum) | 壳 |
| Good Companion(cigarette) | 良友 |
| Camel (cigarette) | 骆驼 |
| Little Swan (washing machine) | 小天鹅 |
| Diamond (watch) | 钻石 |
| Forever (bike) | 永久 |
| Dynasty(grape wine) | 王朝 |
| Elegance(Lady’s wear) | 雅致 |
| Flying Pigeon(bike) | 飞鸽 |
| Vitality(milk) | 活力 |

C. The Combination of the First Two Methods

Trademarks that are translated with this method are usually quite good trademarks because many have associative meanings. The following are some examples in “Table III”.

TABLE III. EXAMPLES OF COMBINATION TRANSLATION

| English | Chinese |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Dakmane(sleeping pill) | 带尔眠 |
| Solid (cord) | 索 |
| Pierre Cardin (leather wear) | 皮尔卡丹 |
| Happy Rider (bike) | 乐达 |
| Whisper(sanitary belt) | 护舒宝 |
| Flora(cosmetics) | 芙露 |
| Citizen(watch) | 西铁城 |
| Canon(camera) | 佳能 |
| Contac(medicine) | 康泰克 |

| English | Chinese |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Tide (washing powder) | 汰渍 |
| Camay (soap) | 佳美 |
| Maxam(toothpaste) | 美加净 |
| Accord (watch) | 雅确 |
| Fiyta(watch) | 飞亚达 |
| Stone (computer) | 四通 |
| Only One (oral liquids) | 昂立一号 |

D. Flexible Translation

Flexible translation is the way in which translators don’t use common methods and they reject the original meaning in order to fight for markets and cater to customers. For example, washing product “Rejoice” is not translated into “欣喜”, instead it’s translated into “飘柔” which has nothing to do with “Rejoice” but is endowed with the feature of beautiful hair. It’s the same with the case of cigarette “Pall Mall”. “Pall Mall” is translated into “顺” which has nothing to do with “Pall Mall” at all. American battery “Duracell” is translated into “金霸王”. “Duracell” means durable cell, which certainly will get welcomed. “金霸王” is the result of translating from the associative meaning. “金霸王” gives people the feeling of super power which relates to battery’s feature.

In a word, the translation of trademarks is not easy and there are many techniques and factors worth noticing. The above — mentioned methods are not perfect and applicable everywhere. Translators should be careful when using any of them.

V. CONCLUSION

All these examples fully illustrate that products’ trademarks are the symbols of their quality and the representatives of their images. Manufacturers not only take a comprehensive consideration when giving their products names but also even more careful when translating them because trademarks are so significant in their competition in the world market. Of course, the translation of trademarks is not an easy thing. Sometimes good translations seem natural and beautiful. This paper only wants to attract the attention of manufacturers and translators that the translation of trademarks is closely related with many related aspects. A good product, if added a pleasant name, will possess inexhaustible glamour. Since good brand can bring so many benefits, why don’t we put efforts in the translation of trademarks?

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