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A Study on Translation of Trademark Words from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

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Abstract:

As a kind of intercultural communication, translation of trademark words involves regional cultures, aesthetic motivation, consumer psychology, and some other factors, such as commercial factor. Firstly, this paper briefly introduces the definition of a trademark word, and analyses the characteristics of a trademark word. Secondly, the paper goes over the main translation theory in translation of trademark words, i.e. equivalent effect principles. Thirdly, it discusses several issues that the translators should give enough attention to when translating trademark words. Lastly, the author summaries some effective translation methods for trademark words translation.

Key words:

trademark words, equivalent effect, translation methods, trademark translation issues

1.Introduction

As the international economic communication becomes more frequent, the economic competition becomes more heated and fiercer. The enterprises must take into consideration a lot of factors which may lead them to success or failure. One of the most important factors that they find they cannot neglect is the trademark of their products. A trademark can be also called a trade name or a brand name. The design of a good trademark will firmly promote the selling of the products. And so will in the foreign markets an appropriate translation of the trademark words. So, in the markets abroad, the translation of the trademark words becomes great significance. And there need to be some principles to guide the translation of trade names.

2. Definition of a Trademark Word and Translation Theory

2.1 Definition of a Trademark Word

A trademark is one of the outcomes of commodity economy. It is “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” [1]. A trademark is a kind of symbol of a product. The functions of trademark may be summarized as follows:

First, a trademark provides information concerning products, e.g., the names, the function, and the material used for the products, etc. Therefore, it is a form of advertising strategy means.

Secondly, a trademark stimulates consumption if it has an active influence.

Thirdly, a trademark symbolizes high quality guarantee and prestige, and provides legal protection.

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A trademark is also called a brand name. It is a design, special name, etc. By remembering its trademark, consumers can recognize a certain product out of other products of the same kind. Strictly speaking, a trademark word belongs to a trademark, which is the verbalized part of a trademark, i.e., it is the part of the written language.

2.2 Characteristics of Trademark Words

Trademark words are special words, which have two kinds of characteristics, i.e. one is the common characteristics, and the other is the unique characteristics. As a kind of words, trademark words have all features like other common words in spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. Moreover, trademark words have their own characteristics, which differentiate trademark words from other common words. The unique characteristics are exclusivity, suggestivity, connotation conversion, and association.

Exclusivity means that a trademark word will gain exclusivity once it has been registered, and this registered trademark word can be and only be used by its owner. In a sense, a trademark is regarded as a sign of an enterprise or a manufacturer, which stands for an enterprise's prestige.

Suggestivity, this characteristic can help trademark reflect its product's uses, function and features. In addition, the characteristic is just the outstanding characteristic of English trademark words, which most of Chinese trademark words lack.

Most trademark words are used and accepted at last through a long process of verbal communication, i.e., they are come into being naturally in society. However, these special words are all created by the designers purposely, then accepted by the society, e.g., Exxon, MAXAM, OMO, these words have no formational motivation in etymology, even have no meanings themselves, while, the coinage of such words are just for use as a sign of a product, so this is the third characteristic of trademark words---connotation conversion. After all, trademark words with this characteristic will accumulate a wealth of glossary of a language.

Association, the last characteristic, is owned by a lot of trademark words. In fact, many trademark words have favourable association. And this kind of favourable association is an indispensable part which the designers should not neglect. For the need of sales promotion, a good trademark word should not only act as a sign of a product, but also take effect itself in the advertisement promotion. So, the customers may get favorable imagination and high quality of the product. In addition, some favourable association of trademark words comes from the words' inherent meaning, and some comes from the historical and cultural connotation of the words, e.g. "Breeze" (a kind of scream like the breeze caress your face), "Ivory" (a kind of soap) very smooth and exquisite like an ivory, "Harmony" (a kind if shampoo) presenting the meaning of "harmonious and perfect", etc.

2.3 Translation Theory

When translating a trademark, the translator should try to duplicate the author's intention and goal of the source language text. It has been said that the overriding purpose of any translation should be to achieve "equivalent effect" [2], which is also called "the equivalent response" principle or "equivalent effect" principle; that is to say, the translator should make every effort to make their translated text reproducing the same effect or almost the same effect on the readers just like that of the original readers obtained from the original text. Nida called it "dynamic equivalence" in 1964, and in 1980s he used the expression "functional equivalence" in describing the degrees of adequacy of a translation [3]. Functional equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it

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in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language [4].

This principle has a degree of application to many types of text, but not the same degree of importance. However, this principle is as a higher degree of importance to vocative texts, because trademark words translation is vocative translation. Therefore, translators should try to create a perfect linguistic unity among sound, form and meaning in translated trademark words. At the same time, they should also overcome the cultural obstacles in the receptor language.

3. Main Issues on Translation of Trademark Words

To achieve the expected effect of readership in foreign markets, translators may have to make some adaptation on the text form or make some adjustment of the information to the original texts, which are the followings in details:

First, there are differences in cultural knowledge between source language and target language, the translator should make corresponding adjustment of the relationship between explicit and implicit information in the text;

Secondly, the difference in culture-specific genre expectation may require an adaptation of the text form to target culture textual and stylistic conventions [5].

The above are the main countermeasures in the practice of vocative texts translating. More often than not, translators have to face many issues as the following:

3.1. Choice of Translation Methods

Translation is based on three pairs of relationship, i.e. two different languages, the native and foreign cultures, and the author and the translator respectively. Therefore, the translated brand names should be in line with target language readers' aesthetic preferences and psychological inclinations to build a broader consumer base. Each enterprise creates or invents their trademark words based on the features and properties of their products, so, they will require their designers to create different trademark words according to different motivations. And the main motivations of the trademark words decisively influence the choice of translation methods. These motivations are the psychological motivation, commercial motivation, sociological motivation, and cultural motivation. Hence, translators should choose the appropriate methods according to different motivations. For example, when translating the psychologically motivated trademark words with implied meanings, translators should emphatically deal with such words from the angle of its meaning. If the implied meanings of the words are well translated, the promotion of the trademark words will be a success. In addition, translating some of this kind of words with transliteration is also a good solution, e.g., Robust “ 乐百氏 ” (make children “robust”— “strong”, then, their parents will be happy.)

3.2 Translation Methods of Trademark Words

As we know, a trademark word comprises that part of a trademark consisting of the words or letters that human can verbalize. Good trademark words not only transmit the information concerning commodities, but also transmit the cultural information. It is very important for the translator to pass on both information. Good trademark words translation will be recognized by the foreign culture, arouse the same sympathy from the foreign consumers. So, the translation of trademark words should neither be neglected by economists, nor by trademark word translators. Sometimes, the trademark words may have equivalence in the target language,

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while sometimes may not. Therefore, it becomes the translator's task to transmit the meanings or ideas to the target consumers. In the light of the motivation of the trademark words designer, the translator should make every effort to make the same effect of the translation on the target consumers no matter what approaches he or she choose.

There are various translation methods for translating trademark words. Of course, literal translation is a primary way of trademark words translation. This method can present the author's original wish, and can keep the conformity with the trademark designs. Here is an example of successful translation of trademark words from English into Chinese, such as "Ladybird", " 瓢 虫 " (books of children). Ladybird is a kind of small insect loved by both Chinese children and the western children. The following are the other main translation methods with some examples.

3.2.1 Transliteration

Many English trademark words originate from the names of people or places. So, it is impossible to translate them literally since there may not be any equivalence in Chinese. Transliteration is the choice of translating trademark words in this situation. What's more, this approach can better maintain the pronunciation of the original words and achieves exoticness.

One of the representatives of transliteration of trademark words is "Mary Kay" (the trademark words of a kind of cosmetics), which is translated into Chinese " 玫琳凯 "." 玫琳凯 " is just a woman's name, but this kind of cosmetics are popular in China. The pronunciation of " 玫 琳 凯 " can give the consumers the creditable association. In Chinese version, " 玫 琳 " corresponds to the pronunciation of "Mary" and can be associated with " 玫瑰 " (rose), showing an image of elegance and beauty. " 凯 " corresponds to "Kay," with the chosen characters balancing both pronunciation and brand tone. This translation preserves the recognizability of the original name while aligning with the aesthetic preferences of Chinese consumers.

There is another successful example of translation. "Columbia" (gramophone records; discs) is translated into " 哥伦比亚 ", this trademark word has been chosen just because the record company lies in Columbia, U.S.A.

3.2.2 Communicative Translation

According to Peter Newmark, communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original [6]. This method focuses on the target audience of the translation. The translator must keep in mind that readers expect a translation that is idiomatic, fluent, natural, easy to understand, and free from obscurity, with foreign elements largely adapted into the target culture and language. Using this method does not mean that the translator disregards the form of the original text; rather, it emphasizes that the translation should conform to the norms of the target language. This requires the translator to break free from the constraints of the original form and transform any expressions that might seem foreign or awkward to the target readers into idiomatic target language expressions, ensuring that readers will not face difficulties in comprehension. Based on the cultural and linguistic context of the target language as well as the maximum acceptability of the target language readers, the translator replaces the original imagery and converts rhetorical devices. For example, translators translate "as poor as a church mouse" into " 一贫如洗 "(penniless)" because Chinese readers might not understand why someone would be "as poor as a church mouse." What's more, in English, an owl is a bird that symbolizes wisdom, as seen in the idiom "as wise as an owl." And the word "owlish" is often used to implies that a person is intelligent and

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serious. For example, “Patrick peered owlishly at us through his glasses.” (Patrick looked at us with a serious and keen expression through his glasses). However, in Chinese culture, the image of the owl is completely different. Because, it is associated with superstitions about omens. Since it is active at night and its call is eerie, people often link its cry to death, saying that the owl’s call is a sign of mourning. If someone hears an owl’s call in the woods, it is believed that there would be a possible death in his or her family [7].

However, here is an example, which has become a failure, because of the neglect of the cultural factor. “Bai Xiang(白象)” (the trade mark of a kind of cell) is a common name in Chinese. The name will give the impression of trustworthy quality to the Chinese. But when it is translated into English literally, the translator himself may neglect the extended meaning of “White Elephant”, which means “an embarrassing gift, a very costly possession that is worthless to its owner and a cause of trouble”. What’s more, “a white elephant” in English is used as a metaphor referring to a costly but useless thing [8]. So, it is not at all surprising that no one would like to buy this kind of cell in the western market.

Here is another example about a food brand “ 白象 ”. The translation of “ 白象 ” was not rendered as “white elephant” in English; instead, it is translated by adopting Chinese phonetic alphabet “Baixiang” directly. The translator not only avoids potential misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication but also highlights the cultural confidence of Chinese domestic brands [9].

Generally, translators use communicative translation can make their works more fluent, concise, and aligned with conventional expressions, fitting into a specific linguistic register. However, this approach can sometimes lead to under-translation, primarily because the translation prioritizes conveying the spirit and meaning of the text over maintaining word-for-word equivalence with the original. Nevertheless, communicative translation is still constrained by the content, form, structure, and wording of the original text, though it excels in leveraging the expressive functions of the target language. The translating goal is to achieve vocative function in target language. Hence, Newmark suggests that, from a stylistic perspective, different types of original texts require different translation methods. He argues that some texts, such as non-literary articles, news, informative texts, textbooks, reports, propaganda, advertisements, notices, and popular fiction, can be best translated by using communicative approach [10].

3.2.3 Mixed Translation Methods

Mixed translation means to translate the trademark words according to the original pronunciation and meanwhile add to a good sense. If the pronunciation and the meaning are well combined, this kind of translation will become a kind of art.

A good trademark word translation with this method will arouse the reader's or the consumers' response and appreciation and thus promote selling. There are many trademark words translated from English into Chinese in this way. “Coca cola” (drink) is put into Chinese “ 可口可乐 ” . The Chinese name “ 可口可乐 ” not only tells the taste of the drink is quite nice (可口), but also implies that the drink will delight (可乐) the consumers. The drink has become so popular in China. In the same way “Pepsi cola” (drink) is put into “ 百事可乐 ”, which implies a good wish that everything goes on well. And this is just accord with the Chinese cultural psychology. “Johnson” (articles of everyday use) is translated into “ 强　生 ”，which is not only pronounced like “Johnson”, but also shows that it will bring them health if the customers use the product. As a name, “Johnson ” is usually put into “ 约翰逊 ”，But here we can see that “ 强生 ” is much better than “ 约翰逊 ”.

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In the same way, a Chinese-produced air conditioner with a trademark word, " 西冷 ", which is translated into "Serene" in the target language. "Serene" means clear and calm, which just implies the feature and high quality of the product. The consumers will have the impression that it will be quiet and peaceful as the air conditioner works.

For some exceptional cases, the above aural-meaning combined method would not achieve a good trademark words translation. Then translators must deal with some trademark words in a more complicated way, considering the psychology of the consumers and the favourable association of the products. This complicated translation would make use of all kinds of translation methods in one trademark word, so long as the trademark word can give clear information of products to people information. It will create a lasting impact on target language consumers, prompting them to respond by making a purchase.

3.2.4 Zero Translation

Any kinds of translation above may cost the consumers much time to accept the translation. Or, there is a new translation may cost no time to acquaint the new products abroad. And this new translation is zero translation. As a result, some famous trademark words composing of English letters which are easy to read and remember, because they are "translated" in such a unique way.

In any case, this is the wonderful way to promote products, because this kind of trademark words is the simplest one to remember. With the acceleration of the internet connection and the international communication, more and more foreign trademark words have been well acquainted on the internet before they are introduced in the domestic market.

For example, "IBM" and "SK-II" are popular in China, and they are "translated" into "IBM" and "SK-II" for the brand itself, standing for the high quality and the good reputation. There are also some other trademark words dealt in this way, such as "CD", "CK". On one hand, "zero translation" satisfies some young consumers' psychology of fashion quest. On the other hand, it transmits all the information of the original brand names. Of course, this translation method is the straightest and economic way.

3.3 On the Current Translated Trademark Words

As we all know, every product should have its own trademark word, therefore, quite a lot of trademarks exist in the international market. Trademark words are closely linked with our life, but it is not an easy thing to recognize and remember each trademark related with our life and hobbies. Thus, it is a process that each trademark word is invented and accepted by people. Besides, more and more new trademark words will be created with the new products. It can be seen, that trademark word translation is an important matter, and how we should treat some nowadays so-called imperfect trademark word translation?

Here is an example: "Seven-up" is a popular drink in China. It is translated into " 七喜 "after it came into Chinese market. The word "Seven-up" would be " 七 上 " if it is translated literally. While "seven" in the western culture means "luckiness and happiness", so flexibly the translator put it into " 七喜 ". And " 喜 " (luckiness and happiness) is loved by the Chinese, and it soon becomes very popular with young people in China. Obviously, this trademark word has helped its enterprise gain its own market. However, some translators advised that "Seven-up" might be also translated into " 八喜 ", because the cultural meaning of "seven" in the western countries is just as the same as the number "eight" in Chinese culture. And " 八喜 "also sounds louder than " 七喜 ".

In my opinion, maybe the translator wants the original culture to be identified by the target consumers by

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putting the trademark word into “七喜”. Since this trademark word has helped its enterprise gain its own market, and this will accelerate the cultural international communication. Although such translation is not perfect in some aspect, it is the best way to retain current translation of such trademark words.

4. Conclusion

With more and more goods poured into and out of China, translation of trademark words has become a new and crucial field. And trademark words translation has become a science as well as an art, too.

Translation of trademark words is a process which covers linguistics, translation theory, aesthetics, intercultural communication, marketing advertising and consumer psychology [11]. The translators should not only convey the original meaning appropriately but also make it accepted as well as appreciated by consumers in target market. In this process, the characteristics and functions of trademark words, with the cultural differences should be notified. Under the guide of "equivalent-effect translation principle, the translators should regard the trademark word translation as the customer-oriented translation. A good trademark word should be understood and remembered easily and arouse the interest of the customers.

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