

## A LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO ADVERTISEMENT TRANSLATION

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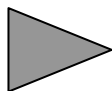
### *Introduction*

The aim of this article is to analyse the specific techniques used in the translation of advertising texts and the difficulty to render their message into the target language.

The translator has to clearly identify the voices in the text, since this is an instance of polyphonic use of language. He has to rightfully transpose the persuasive use of the polyphony. Advertisements use literary devices; they can employ a voice which appears to be speaking personally to the reader.

There are many different terms for the people on either side of an advertising text: from a *literary perspective*, the writer and the reader, from a *scientific perspective*, the sender and the receiver; *social studies* distinguish between producer and consumer, while *linguistics* identifies addresser and addressee. Whatever their labels, the translator has the duty to maintain the same occurrences of voices. What follows may look like a *regular discourse analysis*, but given the different purposes of such analysis, all of the described elements are seen from a translator's perspective. Therefore, the remarks will bear on the *text type, domain, subtype*,

*title, topic, translation difficulties, techniques and standards of textuality*, these being the basic issues in a linguistic approach to translation analysis.




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### *Translation Strategies*

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The aim of a linguistic approach to translation is to find equivalent target language (TL) signs for source language (SL) signs, mainly lexical units, but also syntactic structures – they may be identical in SL and TL, but usually they are different. The purpose is to select the ‘optimal’ equivalent from diverse ‘potential equivalents’ provided by TL.

Debates on the key concept of equivalence range from the School of Leipzig<sup>1</sup> and the studies of Werner Koller (1979) and Eugène Nida (1982) to authors like Vigney and D’Arbelnet (1992), Newmark (1997), or Catford (1998).

For the representatives of the School of Leipzig, linguistic equivalence consists of an identical message after transcoding. Kade<sup>2</sup> distinguishes between several types of equivalence: a) *correspondence*; b) *optional correspondence*; c) *approximate correspondence*; d) *part correspondence*; e) *zero correspondence*.

J.P.Vigney and D’Arbelnet (1992) spell out seven strategies of linguistic and stylistic equivalence:

1. *Emprunt* (borrowing): spelling and pronunciation adopted to TL rules;
2. *Calque* (calque): at the level of lexical unit - literal and linear substitution of morphemes;
3. *Traduction literale* (literal translation): substitution of syntactic structures in SL by formally corresponding ones in TL;
4. *Transposition*: change in syntactic structure – replacing one word class with another one without changing the meaning of the message;
5. *Modulation*: change of form caused by change of perspective, by change of point of view;

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of Applied Linguistics and Translatology, Leipzig, institutionalised after the Second World War. In January 1969, the Sektion Theoretische und Angewandte Sprachwissenschaft (TAS, Theoretical and Applied Linguistics Section) was founded, incorporating the Institut für Sprachmittlung (Institute for Language Mediation) which specialised in training interpreters and translators. After 1989, the University underwent major restructuring.

<sup>2</sup> Max Kade: German teacher of American English, whose name was given to the University of Wisconsin



6. *Equivalence*: one and the same situation can be rendered by two texts using completely different stylistic and structural methods – replacement of situation;
7. *Adaptation*: the type of situation referred to by the SL message is unknown in the TL culture – compensation of socio-cultural differences between SL and TL, creation of a new situation that can be considered as equivalent.

The first three strategies outlined by Vigney and D'Arbelnet can be recategorized into *literal translation* or *substitution*, while the last four strategies consist of *oblique translation* or *paraphrasing*, which can be optional or obligatory.

In *A textbook of translation*, Peter Newmark (1997) states that a good translation is “as literally accurate as possible” and analyses the translation procedures which can be used for sentences and smaller units of language.

J.C. Catford (1998) states in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, that ‘SL and TL texts or items are translation equivalents when they are interchangeable in a given situation’. He stresses the importance of linguistic translation equivalence at the sentence level.

Eugène Nida does not recommend identity but equivalence in the sense of equal value or similar significance. The focus should fall on the receptor and on his/her response to the message. Therefore, the correctness of the translation must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended understands it correctly and reacts to it. The translator must respect the features of the receptor language and exploit the potentialities of the language to the greatest extent. Rather than force the formal structure of one language upon another, the effective translator has to be quite prepared to make any formal changes necessary to reproduce the message in the distinctive structural forms of the receptor language.

Consequently, according to Nida, translating consists in reproducing the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first *in terms of meaning* and secondly *in terms of style*: “the translator must strive for equivalence rather than for identity” (Nida, 1982: 24). The best translation does not sound like a translation.

Nida distinguishes between *formal equivalence*, which focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content and *dynamic equivalence*. In formal equivalence translation, one is concerned with such correspondence as poetry to

poetry, sentence to sentence and concept to concept. Viewed from this formal orientation, one is concerned with the message match in the receptor language as closely as possible to the source language.

*Dynamic equivalence* aims at complete naturalness of expression and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behaviour relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of source-language context in order to comprehend the message. Looking at translation in terms of the receptors, Nida introduces another point of view: the *intelligibility of the translation*. Such intelligibility is not however, to be measured merely in terms of whether the words are understandable and the sentences grammatically constructed, but in terms of the total impact the message has on the one who receives it. Dynamic equivalence is therefore defined in terms of the degree to which the receptor decodes the message in his language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will fail to accomplish its purpose.

Nida recommends a system of translating consisting in a more elaborate procedure which comprises three strategies:

1. *Analysis*: grammatical relationship; meanings of the words, and the combination of words.

2. *Transfer*: After having completed the analysis, it is then essential to work on the elementary meanings of the source language text (SLT) to make them understandable to the receptor language text (RLT) audience. In transferring the message from one language to another, it is the content which must be preserved at any costs; the form, except in special cases such as poetry, is largely secondary, since within each language the rules of relating content to form are highly complex, arbitrary and variable. Transfer regards *idioms*, which are the most obvious candidates for semantic adjustment, *figurative meanings of words*, *generic and specific meanings*, *pleonastic expression*, *formulas*, *discourse structure*, *sentence structure* and *work structures*. The priorities in the process of transfer are at all costs the *content of the message*, *the connotation*, *the emotional flavor* and the *impact of the message* that need to be conveyed as well as possible.



3. *Restructuring*, in which the transferred material is restructured in order to make the final message fully acceptable in the receptor language. Restructuring is considered from three perspectives:

- *meaningful relationship* between the words and combinations of words;
- *referential meaning* of words and special combinations (idioms);
- *conative meaning*, i.e. how users of the language react, whether positively or negatively to the words and their combinations.

Let us consider the following example:

"We've had the kennel shampooed"

"...and we've got the roost off the green."

"We've turned on the lights."

"So where the bloody hell are you?"

The sample above is an Australian advertisement which upset the Canadians, but in North America, it is not the word 'bloody' that was creating problems, but the word 'hell'.

The fact is that what is generally regarded as the same grammatical construction may represent a number of different relationships and have many different meanings.

The analysis of the meaning of words should consist in the study of words as symbols which refer to objects, abstracts, relations and the study of each word as particular meaning specified by the grammatical constructions in which it occurs; this is called *syntactic marking*. The specific meaning of a word is marked by the interaction of that term with the meaning of other terms in the environment. This conditioning of the surrounding terms is called by Nida *semi tactic marking*. Here we are dealing not with functional grammatical classes but with categories of meaning which can be said to be compatible or incompatible with each other and which mutually select or eliminate each other.

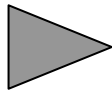
Though the analysis of related meanings of a single term is important, the analysis of the meaning of words has related meanings. Actually the different meanings of a single word are rarely in competition, for they do not have only relatively well-defined markers which help to differentiate the meanings, but often they are so diverse that they do not compete with one another for the same semantic domain. In his paper "Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft" (Introduction to Translation Studies/Science), a point of reference for German-speaking students

and teachers ever since it was first published in 1979, Werner Koller emphasizes that the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) have to be equivalent respecting the following:

- extralinguistic facts/ state of affairs (denotative equivalence)
- verbalization, including connotations, style (connotative equivalence)
- the text norms and language norms (text normative equivalence)
- TT audience, addresses (pragmatic equivalence)
- Specific aesthetic, formal, characteristic features (formal aesthetic equivalence)

In translating advertisements, the translator needs to be aware of the degree of intertextuality. Advertisements, as an example of media texts, cannot exist without other discourse text types. One can say that they are parasitic in that they borrow elements from all discourse types, and then use them for their own purposes. Advertisements are not islands unto themselves. They exist in various genres and media. Ads typically occur together with, or embedded in other discourses to which they make no direct reference.

Mention should be made here of Baker's concept of *anchorage* (1999). Linguistic elements can serve to anchor or constrain the preferred reading of an image, and conversely, the illustrative use of an image can anchor an ambiguous verbal text. For the translator this could be useful, in that the meaning attached to an image is limited and thus it is easier to translate the text. In other words, it limits the options for interpretation.



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### *Translation and semiotic theory*

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*Semiotic theory* provides the translator with tools and non-linguistic perspective when dealing with persuasive advertisements. However, the translator needs a translation method / theory to carry out the transfer of cultural elements from one language into another in order to achieve an equivalent message in the target language and thus an equivalent response from the receivers / consumers.

Roger Bell explains the translation in terms of the above statement as follows:

*'The type of process which I have in mind involves transfer operations performed on one semiotic entity, belonging to a certain system, to generate another semiotic*



entity, belonging to a different system. In other words, this category of processes is inter- (or, rather, cross)-systemic.' (Bell, 1991)

A specific culture would represent one semiotic entity or system. This entity would incorporate linguistic and non linguistic elements. Translating an advertisement from culture 1 to culture 2 would thus entail the transfer of signs between two systems.

A transfer situation involves certain relationships, namely: between each one of the two entities and the system within which it is situated (in other words, how acceptable this entity is to the norms of the system); and between the two entities themselves (in other words, the level of equivalence or correspondence). In a translation situation this means that:

- the sign in the target text must be acceptable to the users in that sign system, i.e. the culture,
- the meaning (message) generated by the sign in the target text must have an equivalent effect on the receivers, i.e. the same effect as on the source text receivers.

In order to make the translator achieve these goals, guidelines have to be drawn up to provide the necessary assistance.

When translators are confronted with the task of analyzing an advertisement (whether in the printed media, on television or radio), they have to find an equivalent effect on the receivers in the target language and culture. This means that the advertiser had certain aims in mind embedded in the message of the source text/advertisement ).

The proposed questions to analyze advertisements semiotically should serve as guidelines and not as rules. The approach is to set questions and then to find answers based on the questions raised.

• **Language-oriented questions:**

The first set of questions deals with linguistic matters:

- What precisely is being advertised?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What (linguistically) suggests this?
- What part is played by words ?
- What intertextual references are made?

- Is humour used? How and what?
- What are the alternative interpretations, if any?
- What is the source of the message?
- Are there irregularities (incorrect spelling, play on words)?
- Are there any neologisms or archaisms?
- Are there ideological names, events or people?
- Are there national symbols? What do they signify?
- What are the references to time, place, people and historical events?
- What is the style?
- What is the register?
- What is the tone?
- Is the text written/ spoken in the first or third person?
- Are there any poetic devices such as rhyme and rhythm?
- When and where are the voice inflections?
- Are accents being used? What are they?

#### • Identifying the sign

Determining the sign is identifying the *medium* used, the *genre* to which the text belongs and the *context* in which it was found:

- What are the signs, the objects and the interpretants?
- What do they signify? What is their relationship?
- What real claims are made?

#### • Paradigm analysis

- What paradigms are evident? What do they have in common?
- To which class of paradigms (medium, genre, and theme) does the advertisement belong?
- What is the context of the advertisement?
- What paradigms are noticeably absent?
- What contrasted pairs are evident?
- What connotative meanings are suggested?

#### • Syntagmatic analysis

This analysis identifies and describes syntagmatic structures that take forms such as *narrative* or *argumentative*.

- What is the relationship between the signifiers? Are some more important than others?





- What is the text used for ?
- What is the relationship between the text and the context?
- How does the sequential or spatial arrangement of the elements influence the meaning?

- **Metonyms and metaphors**

- What metaphor shapes and metonyms are used?
- How do they shape and influence the meaning of the text?
- What influence do they have on the context?

- **Intertextuality**

- Does the advertisement refer to other genres?
- What are they?
- How does this influence the reading/ understanding of the advertisement?
- Does it allude or compare with other texts within the genre?
- Does one code within the text (for instance a captation to an advertisement ) serve to ‘*anchor*’ another? If so, how?

- **Semiotic codes**

- Which codes are specific to the medium?
- Which codes are shared with other media?
- How do the codes involved relate to each other ?
- Are the codes broadcast or narrowcast?
- What is the mode of address?
- What cultural / ideological assumptions are made?
- To whom are these assumptions directed?
- What is the preferred reading in the source? Why?
- How far does this reflect or depart from dominant cultural values?
- How open to interpretation does the sign seem to be?

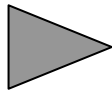
- **Benefits of semiotic analysis**

- What insights has this analysis offered?
- What is the use of this for the translator?
- What other strategies should the translator use to ensure a dynamically equivalent translation of an advertisement?

For the translator the choice of one paradigm over another in a specific context is significant. The choice of a specific paradigm will influence/determine the meaning generated by the sign. The meaning of what was chosen is determined by the meaning of what was not. The choice of paradigms is based on factors such as *code, connotation and style*.

One could apply the '*communication test*', which is used to determine distinctive paradigms and define their significance. A specific paradigm in a sign is selected and then alternatives that are appropriate to the context are considered. Every alternative must be able to occupy the same structural position as that which appears in the sign. The effects of each substitution must be considered in terms of how this might affect the sense made by the sign. This might involve a substitution in *age, sex, class or ethnicity, substituting objects, etc.*

The translator could use this test when translating an advertisement from one language and culture into another. On the linguistic level, the paradigms of the natural language used in the advertisement have to be identified; then the possibilities and alternatives in the target language which would be appropriate to the context must be considered. The translator has to consider the various alternatives regarding the *choice of words, word function, style, register, tone, etc.*, and all of them must fit into the context of the advertisement. The final choice must be considered in terms of how the meaning of the sign in the source language was translated into the target language and with what effect.



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***Syntagm-paradigm discursive axes***

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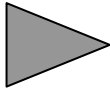
De Saussure (1916) organized signs into codes: *paradigms* and *syntagms*. Their dimensions are often presented as axes, where the vertical axis is paradigmatic and the horizontal axis syntagmatic. Advertising discourse can also be presented on these two axes: the axis of the *text* and that of the *context*.

We equate context with a paradigm and text with a syntagm, as a paradigm is a set of associated signs which are all members of a category, for instance the vocabulary of the source text (natural language). The sentences in this text constitute the *syntagm of words*, the orderly combination of interacting signs



(words), which form a meaningful whole. Therefore in semiotics the paradigm is chosen first and thus the context and then the *syntagm* (text).

The task of the translator is thus to identify the *paradigms* (*context*) and then the *syntagm* (text). The translator must ask himself why one paradigm was chosen rather than another. Once this question can be answered he/she should look at the syntagm (*text*), as the syntagm is created by the choice of paradigm (e.g. *vocabulary*). The choice of vocabulary in a persuasive advertisement would give the translator certain information when having to translate the advertisement into another language and culture.



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### *Final remarks*

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By combining principles and methods from both disciplines, *discourse analysis* and *semiotics*, the translator can approach cultural elements in an advertisement, e.g. a persuasive advertisement, in conjunction with a suitable translation theory that fulfils the requirements set by *the synthesis of discourse and semiotic analysis*. Cultures are unique due to their distinguishable identities that evolve over time and change constantly. The mass media play a significant role in the exchange, demise and dominance of culture. The role of the translator is to identify the cultural codes and find equivalents in the advertisements, but also to be sensitive to emerging cultures and subcultures.

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