

Research on Automobile Advertising Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory and Reception Aesthetics Theory

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Abstract. Reception aesthetics theory believes readers should be highlighted, that is to clear the dominant position of advertising audiences, and the realization of advertising functions depends on reader's understanding and acceptance. Based on the theory of reception aesthetics, this paper summarizes the characteristics of English and Chinese slogans which gives guidance to further analyze the current status of automobile advertising translation, which is characterized by domestication, accompanied by translation skills such as literal translation, free translation, translation, translation and conversion. Combining Skopos Theory with reception aesthetics, this paper analyzes the cases of English-Chinese translation of automobile advertisements and finds automobile advertisements which gradually apply the above theories, are now trying to be as close as possible to audience's aesthetic feelings when being translated. However, this kind of practice is not enough and there are still literal translation and the problem of divesting audience's aesthetics in this process. Therefore, this paper proposes that when doing automobile translations, readers should be placed in the central position while combining brand concepts, target language and cultural background of the target market along with its habits all together.

1. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of economic globalization, the economic ties between countries have become increasingly close. Among them, since the birth of automobile in 19th century, automobile market has been expanded due to the special nature of its products. With the deepening of China's reform and opening up, many foreign automobile brands have entered Chinese automobile market. In this situation, in order to promote sales and maintain brand status, automobile advertising has become an important marketing strategy. To achieve the purpose of publicity among consumers from different languages and cultural backgrounds, advertising translation is very important.

2. Literature review

This paper takes reception aesthetics theory as the main theoretical support, while standing in the position of commercial advertising translation, using skopos theory and Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory to analyze the translation of automobile advertisements from English to Chinese.

2.1 Reception aesthetics

Reception aesthetics, also known as reception theory, is a theoretical system based on phenomenology, hermeneutics and readers' acceptance of practical activities. There are two main points in reception aesthetics. One is reader-centered theory and the other is aesthetic experience theory. Reception aesthetic theory holds that any text itself does not produce an any meaning, the meaning of the work should be produced through the process of reader's reading.[1]

Reception aesthetics has changed the original translation thinking mode, created an equal relation between authors, works and readers, and studied the value and significance of the work from a new perspective, provided a new perspective for the application of applied translation. Fang Mengzhi[2] associated reception aesthetics with the status of translators and pointed out "the

appreciation, depreciation, deviation and default in the process of information transmission are mainly related to the information receptivity of translators, readers or listeners.” Cao Yinghua[3] emphasized the relationship between reception aesthetics and readers in literary translation. He believed that the reader, as the subject of acceptance, is a dynamic subject and also the ultimate client of both literature and translation. Hong Ming[4] deepened the relationship between “reader-centered theory” of reception aesthetics and translation, he proposed that translators should not blindly yield to readers, but to transcend readers, create readers, broaden readers’ horizons and therefore to improve the language and cultural accomplishment of target readers. That is the concern for readers in a more positive sense.

As a vocative text, translations of advertising hope consumers can accept the content from the translation in order to achieve marketing goals. Therefore, advertising translation needs to put readers first, which coincides with the reader-centered theory of reception aesthetics. Consequently, with the characteristics and advantages that reception aesthetics has in translation activity, especially in the process of advertising translation, this study decided to use reception aesthetics as the main theory to explore and analyze the translation of automobile advertisements in Chinese market. However, since reception aesthetics is still a new subject, there are great research value and space of this subject. This study will propose corresponding strategies for advertisement translation (from English to Chinese) to automobile enterprises in order to improve the quality of advertisement translation of automobile enterprises and promote sales by accepting reception aesthetics.

2.2 Advertising translation

As an important part of international competition of enterprise products, advertising translation is a translation practice with high commercial value. When translating advertisements, there are three principles should be followed, namely “faithfulness”, “creativity” and “expansibility”. Advertising translation itself is an intercultural communication activity, while the culture and ideas are constantly changing with times which requires translators to fully understand the changing of society, public’s both psychological and practical demand and the background and meaning of advertising so that translators can continually make appropriate improvements in the translation process, and meet public’s psychological need.[5]

Because of its interdisciplinary background, advertising translation can be regarded as a comprehensive stylistic of aesthetics, literature, linguistics, intercultural communication, etc., which requires translation to convey information, attract consumers, while meeting the requirements of aesthetics. Yang Qi[6] along with other scholars studied the intercultural communication of style of advertising from the perspectives of sociology, culture and marketing, and changed the “poetic quality” of advertising style translation into a “rationalized” conscious behavior; Zeng Li[7] talked about translations of advertisements from the perspective of cognitive context of target audiences. He believed that due to the change of the corresponding cognitive context, it’s difficult for the translation to be equivalent to the original in terms of acceptance, understanding and reaction. San You[8] and other scholars pointed out the importance of conversion of cultural image in advertising translation from the theory of acceptance.

As a kind of advertising translation, automobile advertising translation raises many specific and special problems while under the guidance of advertising translation. Therefore, this study will use the interdisciplinary characteristics of advertising translation to analyze the current status of automobile advertising translation in the Chinese market, and use the theory of reception aesthetics to study the existing problems of automobile advertising translation (from English to Chinese) and fill the blank of research on automobile advertisement translation by using the theory of reception aesthetics and put forward corresponding suggestions.

2.3 Skopos theory

Skopos theory discusses translation behaviors on the basis of original texts. It believes one of the important factors in determining the purpose of translation is the audience, that is, the potential readers of the target text who normally have specific cultural background knowledge, expectations

for the target text, and certain communication needs.

According to skopos theory, Zhang Jinlan[9] pointed out that in order to better achieve the purpose of translation, some translation methods that violate existing translation standards should be re-evaluated. Since skopos theory is proposed pretty early, in recent years, many scholars have combined the skopos theory with other theories. Zhou Mengzhen[10] believed “skopos theory is a theoretical system with diversified translation standards under the instruction of the purpose of translation.” Tao Youlan[11] turned her attention to the role that skopos theory plays in teaching translation, proposed that it is necessary to do demand analysis for the preparation of teaching materials in order to reflect user’s intentions.

The language used in advertising whose purpose is to attract audiences, is different from other languages. Therefore, for advertising translation, skopos theory is very applicable. In most cases, the automobile advertisement translation was analyzed by the previous scholars from the perspective of which demonstrates the guiding and fitting degree of skopos theory on the study of automobile advertisement translation while reflecting the saturation of this theory. Therefore, this study chooses to not only use the skopos theory to analyze the translation of automobile advertisements (from English to Chinese), but the reception aesthetics to provide a new perspective for the research of automobile advertisement translation and to make corresponding suggestions.

2.4 Eugene Nida’s functional equivalence theory

Nida’s functional equivalence theory, also known as dynamic equivalence theory, puts the focus of the translation process on recipient’s response, while highlighting the equivalence and consistency of the translation and the original text in terms of “function”. Li Wenge[12] believed the so-called functional equivalence was based on “comparing the readers’ understanding and appreciation of the original text with recipient’s understanding and appreciation of the translated text.”

In functional equivalence theory, to a certain extent, the accuracy of the translation depends on readers and their responses, which somehow “injects a new vitality into translation studies”[13]. However, there’s also criticism toward Nida’s functional equivalence theory. Many scholars believe excessive preference for readers’ preferences will affect the expression of information. The Chinese translation community has formed a situation in which “the words must be translated under Nida’s theory”[14]. In this regard, Qi Zhengkun proposed “those translation standards which exist simultaneously should be recognized in a tolerant attitude and they should be considered as a whole system with specific functions in which every standard completes each other”[15]. In a word, it is necessary to view functional equivalence theory in a dialectical manner when doing translation practice.

The most important thing in advertising translation is the accuracy of translating the source language into the target language. On this basis, it can be re-created which makes the slogan more in line with the target language and culture. In the process of re-creation, it is necessary to use functional equivalence theory to do advertising translation. This study sees the relationship between advertising translation and functional equivalence theory, and therefore decides to use functional equivalence theory to analyze automobile advertising translation (from English to Chinese) and to provide new research perspective meanwhile putting forward suggestions from the perspective of reception aesthetics.

3. Different characteristics of Chinese and English automobile advertising

There are obvious differences in language habits between Chinese and English. Guan Shiwen believed such differences are mainly reflected in the use of words and their logical structure[16]. In terms of the use of words, English uses prepositions and pronouns while Chinese prefers verbs and nouns. Turning to logical structure, English is more passive while Chinese is more active; English prefers double negation while Chinese uses affirmative sentences; English uses positive structure to indicate negation while Chinese is the opposite. As a concise expression, advertising can best reflect the characteristics of one language. Therefore, when doing advertising translation, the characteristics of different languages will have various influences on translation. Thus, the

differences between English and Chinese have also had a certain impact on the translation of automobile advertisements. The features of English automobile advertising are as follows:

First, English automobile advertisements tend to use colloquial and simplistic vocabulary. Compared with using whole sentence or paragraph, they prefer simple words in order to narrow the distance between products and consumers. For example: Future my future--Chevrolet; Breakthrough technology, enlightenment in the future--Audi. Second, English automobile advertisements like to use a relatively large or even exaggerated words to show the car and deepen the consumer's impression thus enhance consumer's trust in the brand. For example: Beyond the future--Nissan; A car AD never give you trouble -- Franklin brand. Third, English automobile advertisements prefer to use a slogan that is positive, aesthetic and even poetic to shape the brand image and enhance consumers' desire to purchase products. For example: Life art only your pool--BMW 7 series; All for your heart --Kia.

In contrast, due to the influence of Chinese, Chinese automobile advertisements prefer to present their slogan in the form of four-character, in order to meet Chinese aesthetic requirements which is "better to use even numbers" and "taking four words as appropriate" and also to meet the requirements of language refinement in advertising. For example: 坐红旗车，走中国路——一汽红旗 (Take one Faw-Hongqi, take the road with Chinese characteristics.---Faw-Hongqi); 驾驭现代，成就未来——现代汽车(Seize the moment, make the future---Hyundai Motor Group). Besides, Chinese automobile advertisements also prefer to put popular song lyrics and verses in their advertisements in order to create a sense of intimacy among consumers and increasing brand awareness. For example: 路遥知马力，日久见“跃进”——跃进 (Long distance proves, time sees YUEJIN)---YUEJIN,SAIC MORTO; 爱你经得起考验——中兴 (Love for you can stand the test. --- ZXAUTO). Chinese automobile advertisements also use words that are close to the lives of the people, which shorten the distance between brands and consumers so that consumers can have a sense of intimacy with brands and products and thus promoting sales. For example: 全顺一路，安全到家——江铃 (Safety all the way home --- JIANGLING MOTORS CORPORATION,LTD); 造老百姓买得起的好车——吉利 (A good car that the people can afford --- Geely Auto).

In summary, English advertising translation can both be close or be Greek to readers while in contrast, Chinese slogans pay more attention to practicality, which sometimes contain the "people-oriented" thinking. Therefore, based on the above analysis of the characteristics of both English and Chinese automobile advertisements, the translations produced under appropriate translation strategies and methods can better exert the functions of automobile advertisements in different markets and better complete commercial activities.

4. Automobile advertising translation overview from the perspective of skopos theory and Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory

The current automobile advertising translation field, to a certain degree, is actually under the guidance of skopos theory and Nida's functional equivalence theory. These two theories are actually a step-by-step progression of achieving the function of translation. Skopos theory emphasizes that translation should fully express the function and purpose of the original text. Nida's functional equivalence theory puts the focus of translation process on the recipient's response and emphasizes the realization of meaning.

Therefore, current automotive advertising translation field has adapted domestication as the main translation strategy. Under the guidance of domestication, which minimizes the exotic content in translation and aims to be close enough to readers in the target language, translators should select a more appropriate translation method according to the specific case, which sometimes can be literal translation, free translation, creative translation and so on. All these methods are designed to bring as much as the original content to the target audience. For example: "Born for the road, the road to the foot of the new Mercedes-Benz M Class—SUV", which was translated as "为路而生，道路就在脚下——奔驰新款 M 级越野车", adopted the method of literal translation rhetoric while

making the slogan more refined and more in line with the reading habits of Chinese readers. The slogan of Buick “In Search of Excellence” which was under the guidance of free translation, was translated as “别克轿车：志在千里”. Its original meaning was very ambitious while its translation described the car in a personification way, which made it easier to resonate among target consumers. In addition, for automobiles, the mileage represents their quality. The translation “志在千里” (“Aspirations in a Thousand Miles”) not only expresses the brand’s confidence in its product, but also conveys a signal of the good quality of this car, which is conducive to the sale.

Another model of Mercedes-Benz designed its slogan as “Better Together alone-Benz GL Class Luxury SUV”. When it was translated into Chinese, it used the method of creative translation. The Chinese version “独乐乐不如众乐乐——奔驰 GL 级豪华越野车” which combines the specific performance and advantages of this car, left an image of this product to the consumers that it would be a pleasure to drive this car, and this fun should be shared with everyone. Translations like that quote the famous sayings in Chinese ancient books, bringing consumers, brands, and products closer.

Besides, current automobile advertising translations (from English to Chinese) also applied conversion and division into translation. For example, “The most beautiful moment in front of you—Mercedes Benz CLK Cabriolet”, which was translated under the division translation technique, was translated into two parts “最美一刻，就在您面前——奔驰 CLK 敞篷跑车”. Another example which used the technique of conversion was the translation of “Sharp-lines, Mercedes-Benz GLK— interpretation of tough qualities of medium sized luxury SUV class”, in which the translator convert “interpretation” into a verb. The final translation was “凌厉线条，诠释硬朗实质——奔驰 GLK 级豪华中型 SUV”

In summary, the current automobile advertising translation field which is under the guidance of skopos theory and Nida’s functional equivalence theory, shows a great characteristic of adapting domestication as the main translation strategy, accompanied by specific translation skills such as literal translation, free translation, creative translation, division translation and conversion translation. Whatever the translation method is, the current automobile advertisement translation (from English to Chinese) is still based on the original text. Its focus is on how to express the original content better, which will somehow affect audiences’ feelings while accepting the translation. Domesticating translation and foreignizing translation should actually be regarded as a whole, not in oppositions. When translating the original text into the target language by using domestication method, translators will inevitably be influenced by original language culture, carry the characteristics of original language and the culture it comes from. Therefore, it is really necessary to introduce the theory of reception aesthetics to automobile advertising translation field.

5. Research on automobile advertising translation from the perspective of reception aesthetics theory

The purpose of automobile advertisement translation is to have the effect among consumers from different culture backgrounds and to achieve media and commercial purpose of advertising. The object and core of reception aesthetics is the reader. Reception aesthetics lay emphasis on creating resonance in readers’ aesthetic experiences, which coincides with the function of advertisement. So naturally automobile advertising translation will be affected by and absorb something from reception aesthetics. Toyota Motor Corporation, which is famous for its creative advertisement translation, makes its advertising translation fully adopt reception aesthetics theory.

According to readers who are from different consumer markets, Toyota has translated its advertising in a way that conforms to the corresponding language habits and cultural background. For example, for the English-speaking market, Toyota’s slogan is: where there is a way, there is a Toyota. When it comes to Chinese market, Toyota translates its slogan as “车到山前必有路，有路必有丰田车” (There must be a road ahead of the car. There must be a Toyota car on the road.) This translation uses one Chinese saying “There must be a road to the front of the mountain and the boat will straighten itself when it comes under the bridge”, while retaining its imitation rhetoric and

remaining Chinese characteristic. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, such translation is a good reflection of “aesthetic experience theory”. While using that Chinese saying to evoke Chinese consumers’ memories and familiarity, it also brings Chinese consumers and Toyota brands closer. This fully achieves the function of marketing and meanwhile realizes development of business activities.

The slogan of BMW New Five Series in China “有容，乃悦” (Capacity makes you pleasant.) is in the same case. Literally, the intention of BMW New Five Series Extended Edition which is to publicize the cars’ wheelbase has been lengthened 14 cm is not that clearly expressed. If we see it in a another way, that is “the new 5 Series Extended Edition increases the rear space, allowing the driver to gain more comfort and enjoyment”, we can understand this slogan better: The slogan extracted from one old Chinese saying “有容，处变亦泰然；有容，闹市亦静室。乃悦。” (“tolerance brings both external and inner peace; tolerance makes one joyful.”) expresses the good intention of BMW’s special release for Chinese market. Another example is the Chinese translation of Mercedes-Benz S500’s advertising: “前所未有，因为之前所有” (“It never happened before because it all happened before”). Obviously, this slogan means the new S-Class Mercedes-Benz Limousine is developed from the previous S-class, which heritages the luxury quality of the previous type. Take a close look at this translation, first the four-character idiom “前所未有” (“It never happened before”) has a cultural resonance between the audience and subtly make the audience has an expectation for the luxury quality of Mercedes-Benz S500, the latter half “因为之前所有” (“because it all happened before”), which was similar to the first half of, reflects the conciseness of Chinese language and conveys to the audience that the high quality of new products is both the inheritance and development of the previous products. As a result, this translation promotes the advantages and highlights of Mercedes-Benz S500 while, at the same time, enhanced Chinese consumers’ intimacy toward the brand, which naturally promoted the sales of Mercedes-Benz S500.

However, Benz’s translation for its CLK Roadster is not so good. The original advertisement is “Travel-ready to journey sped-Benz CLK Cabriolet” and its translation is “旅行——随时准备好上路疾驶——奔驰 CLK 敞篷跑车”. Standing in the perspective of reception aesthetics, this translation does not fully consider reader’s feelings. The mark of translation was so obvious that this translation focuses too much on the original slogan while ignoring to be close enough to the target language. As a result, although this advertisement has been somehow successfully translated but the function of advertising has not been fully realized, especially the publicity function. From this case, we can see that just in the Mercedes-Benz auto company, the application of reception aesthetics to its automobile advertisement translation is not on the same level which left a large room for further development. This problem emerged in Mercedes-Benz can also reflected the entire automobile advertising translation industry.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of commercial advertising is realizing commercial value of both products and advertising itself. In the face of different consumer groups in the context of globalization, car advertising translation must be reader-centered and be able to resonate culture and life experiences among target audience, that is, to satisfy the “reader-centered” and “aesthetic experience” theory which are the cores of reception aesthetics. Therefore, fully considering reception aesthetics is an indispensable part of automobile advertising translation and even modern advertising translation.

As the cases shown above, there are already auto companies having accepted reception aesthetics theory in their advertising translations. For such enterprises, if they want to better meet the requirements of reception aesthetics, achieve the goal of reception aesthetics, and complete commercial activities, I reckon they can consider recruiting translators from the target language market to the translation team, that is, forming a multinational translation team. In this way, it can not only help the company to fully spread its business philosophy and better satisfy its business orientation, but to realize the value of the product by using a more authentic language which can be more easily accepted by the target language consumer. However, it is undeniable that since

reception aesthetics is still a new subject in its infancy, practices are not enough and there are still literal translation and the problem of divesting audience's aesthetics in this process. This requires more auto companies to adjust their advertising strategies promptly, use reader-oriented strategy, integrate target language with cultural background of the target market along with its habits and brand concept all together.

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