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Translation problems in advertising: a study of selected South African and German advertising slogans

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with wealth, prestige, abundance and high society - all things the normal consumer can only dream of. The slogan does not try to persuade by reasoned argument. It creates the illusion that whoever buys and wears Rolex watches will automatically be part of this high society and elite.

The slogan is entirely based on hidden persuasion and relies on its appeal to the consumer's hidden needs. There are no word plays, rhymes or other stylistic techniques which are often characteristic features of slogans.

The only problem with which the translator is confronted in translating this slogan into German is the translation of "die Grossen" which literally translated refers to "the big ones".

Suggestions for the translation of this specific slogan:

T H E W O R L D ' S E L I T E W E A R R O L E X

or

T H E E L I T E W E A R R O L E X

or

A L L O V E R T H E W O R L D T H E

E L I T E W E A R R O L E X

****

e) "W H A T D R I V E S A M A N I S

O F T E N W H A T A M A N D R I V E S"

(BMW)

This slogan is written in the form of a simple statement based on a play of words. The advertising slogan is divided into two parts, both making use of exactly the same words but in a different word order.

The first part "what drives a man" refers to the reason behind a man's will to achieve something and the second part "what a man drives" provides the answer, in this case, the car he uses.

The word play centers on the verb "to drive". In the first part the verb is used idiomatically, in the second part it refers to the simple action of driving a car.

The implicit meaning of the slogan is that by driving a BMW a man will be able to achieve even more in life.

The slogan is almost untranslatable, firstly because there is no equivalent for the word play on "drive" in German and secondly because the use of the same words in a different word order cannot be retained in German either.

The only solution would be to create an entirely new and different slogan in German, for example:

B M W - D E R W A G E N L E N K T D E N M A N N

or

B M W - W A G E N V O N W E L T

or

B M W - D I E Z U K U N F T S C H O N H E U T E E R R E I C H E N

The accepted German slogan for BMW "Gehen Sie aufs Ganze" is also a fair equivalent of the English version.

f) "I H R G U T E R S T E R N A U F A L L E N S T R A S S E N"

(Mercedes Benz)

This slogan is a simple positive statement based on an idiomatic expression. "Einen guten Stern haben" means that something protects you from danger or evil.

The slogan appeals to the need for safety and security in consumers and implies that Mercedes Benz will protect them from accidents. Driving a Mercedes means safety, security and protection.

In addition, the star is also the logo of Mercedes Benz and this makes the slogan doubly effective.

The official English version of the Mercedes Benz advertisements in South Africa reads:

"E N G I N E E R E D L I K E N O O T H E R C A R I N T H E W O R L D"

As a translation, this slogan is not very satisfactory. The phrase "like no other car in the world" has almost become a cliché in the advertising world since almost every product is said to be the "best" or "greatest" in the world. However, the image of "German engineering" in South Africa does render its use plausible.

A far better translation could be:

R E A C H F O R T H E M E R C E D E S B E N Z S T A R

This slogan has three levels of meaning:

1. To reach for the stars
   i.e. to reach high

2. The star referring to the star which represents the logo of Mercedes Benz.

3. Star in the sense of famous or great.

g) "J I M B E A M . T H E G E N T L E M A N S D R I N K"

This advertising slogan is unique for translation purposes. The English slogan was taken as it stands and placed in a German magazine. Even though it was not translated, the slogan is still successful because it is fully understood by German speakers. "Gentleman" has almost become an integral part of the German language and the same can be said of the word "drink". The play on words "gentle" and "man" and "gentleman" is also very effective since it adds an element of surprise to the slogan.

h)

"B I T T E . . . Z U M B E S T E N A M
B E S T E N . . . E I N B I T

This slogan is practically untranslatable.

The alliteration and assonance and the fact that the wordplay is so embedded in the source language culture create insurmountable problems for the translator. Pinchuck compares this slogan with the English Haig Whiskey advertisement:

"D O N ' T B E V A G U E - A S K F O R
H A I G "

which is similarly untranslatable.

i)

" G A N S B E S O N D E R S G U T
(U N G A R I S C H E G Ä N S E K E U L E N U N D
G Ä N S E B R Ü S T E G A N S K N U S P R I G
G A N S Z A R T)

This is an advertising slogan for Hungarian geese and another example of "untranslatability".

The slogan relies on the German homophones "ganz" (very) and "Gans" (goose).

The word play appeals to the consumer's sense of humour. Usually, the expressions "besonders gut" and "knusprig" and "zart" are automatically associated with the adverb "ganz" and it comes as a surprise to find that the adverb has been substituted by the noun "Gans" which is at the same time, the advertised product. The advertisement is highly amusing and very effective because of its originality.

j)

"R O T H - H Ä N D L E B R I N G W Ü R Z E I N D I E
E N T S C H E I D U N G " (Roth-Händle cigarettes)

This slogan is a simple statement which can be interpreted in a number of ways. The actual meaning, however, remains unclear. A literal translation of the slogan would be:

R O T H - H Ä N D L E A D D S T A S T E / S P I C E
T O T H E D E C I S I O N

This can either refer to the decision of smoking Roth-Händle or to any other decision one makes in life. It could also mean that Roth-Händle cigarettes add a certain flair to your smoking. The slogan is definitely open to interpretation.

An adequate translation into English would be:

R O T H - H Ä N D L E A D D S A B I T O F
S P I C E T O Y O U R L I F E .

The translation has kept the idea of "Würze" or "spice". It is, however, not a word for word rendering of the original and still not a very satisfactory solution.

3. TRANSLATION THEORY AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO THE TRANSLATION OF ADVERTISING SLOGANS

Classical translation theory has established certain principles for the translation of poetry and other literary works. The question arises whether these theories are also valid for the translation of advertising slogans.

Translation consists in transferring the meaning, style and structure of a source language text as closely as possible into the target language.[56]

Whenever speaking about translation it must be emphasized that it is a "communication process, at the beginning of which there is the original author encoding his message in the system of signs put at his disposal by his native language; the message is received - i.e. deciphered and interpreted - by the translator and again expressed by him in his native language, "recoded", to be read and interpreted once more by the reader of the translation." [57]

Many different formulations of principles and practices of translation have been suggested; however, there seems to be no universally accepted theory on the subject.[58] The basic question underlying the theory of translation is the question of translatability: is translation between different languages indeed possible or not. According to Steiner, there are two diametrically opposed points of view. The one, termed universal, holds that the underlying structure of language is "universal and common to all men"[59] and that dissimilarities between languages are only superficial. Translation is possibe because all languages have the same elementary universals and common principles of being.[60]

The opposite view on translatability is called "monadist". It holds that real translation is impossibe because a word in one language

can never actually mean the same as it does in another. There can never be total equivalence - associations and mental images are closely linked to a word and differ from people to people.

Languages are regarded as structures which are entirely different from one another. There is no such thing as translation. "What passes for translation is a convention of approximate analogies, a rough-cast similitude, just tolerable when the two relevant languages or cultures are cognate, but altogether spurious when remote tongues and far-removed sensibilities are in question."[61]

To a certain extent, however, the monadist point of view is absurd. As we have seen, translation is a communicative process - to dismiss translation as an impossible process would mean that communication as such is impossible.

"We do speak of the world and to one another. We do translate intra- and interlingually and we have done so since the beginning of human history. The defence of translation has the immense advantage of abundant, vulgar fact. How could we be about our business if the thing was not inherently feasible, ask Saint Jerome and Luther..."[62] Nabokov feels that it is absurd to dismiss the validity of translation just because it is not always possible and never really perfect.[63]

In The Art of Translation Savory states that translation is indeed possible because of the equivalence that lies behind the different verbal expressions.[64]

The argument should not evolve around translatability as such, but rather around the degree of fidelity the translator has to pursue in his work.[65] Thus, translation has been basically divided into three classes:

1) Metaphrase
2) Paraphrase
3) Imitation[66]

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1) Metaphrase
2) Paraphrase
3) Imitation[66]

Metaphrase is a strictly literal, word for word and line by line translation from the source language into the target language.[67]

Paraphrase is a type of translation which aims at a close and faithful rendering of the original work. It is, however, not a word for word translation. The sense of the original is more strictly followed than its words.[68]

Imitation is a recreation of the original rather than a translation. The translator is not restricted by structure or form. He is interested in rendering the spirit and the meaning of the original by creating a version of his own.[69] [70]

All translations are basically concerned with a faithful rendering of the original text. To what degree, however, the translator can achieve that faithfulness does not alone depend on his skills but to a large extent on the type of source language text. There is a multiplicity of diverse texts, ranging from poems to prose works and scientific and technical documents. Each type of text has its own characteristics and the translation of every one of these text types has its own difficulties.[71]

I. Pinchuck basically distinguishes between two types of documents, between aesthetic and service texts. Aesthetic works include literary works such as poetry, fiction, drama and belle-lettres, and service texts include all the works which do not fall into the first category. Scientific and technical texts are all service texts, but service texts are not always scientific and technical.[72] Advertisements are service texts. Pinchuck remarks: "Some service texts use the techniques of persuasion or seek to arouse emotions, as with publicity material..."[73]

In the translation of advertising slogans, <u>how</u> the specific advertisement is written is often more important than <u>what</u> it is about. To a certain extent, this is also true for the translation of poetry and other literary works, whereas, in a scientific and technical translation it is the message that is important - the way in which this message has been written generally plays a minor role.

The translation of advertising slogans seems to have a special place within the bounds of translation theory. There are no hard and fast rules that apply specifically to the translation of advertising slogans. The nature of the slogan itself determines in what way it has to be translated to achieve the desired effect.

As previous examples have shown, all three "classes" of translation, namely, Metaphrase, Paraphrase and Imitation can be applied in the translation of advertising slogans.

Although a word for word translation or metaphrase may often result in a distorted, incomprehensible and completely unimaginative message, there are, however, some advertising slogans which can be literally translated without losing their effect and without destroying their persuasive element. The previously mentioned slogan, "Think Thin", can easily be translated into German by "Denk Dünn". This is an example of a word for word translation where the effect of the original version is in no way lost. The same applies to the slogan, "A Diamond is forever" and its translation, "Ein Diamant ist unvergänglich."

Paraphrase is another form of translation sometimes used in the translation of advertising slogans. It attempts to obtain a close rendering of the style and meaning of the original without "distorting" the target language text. The PLAYERS slogan for example: "Some things in life have a special quality", was paraphrased in the German translation: "Manchmal bietet Ihnen das Leben etwas ganz Besonderes".

It is a relatively close translation of the original, although far from being a word for word translation.

Imitation seems to be used fairly often in the translation of advertising slogans. It is often the only way to achieve an adequate and effective translation. The translator is not restricted by the words or the structure of the original slogan and can make use of his creative skills. In cases of "untranslatability" (e.g. Bitte...ein Bit) it is best to create a completely

new slogan which should be as effective and persuasive as the original.

Thus, metaphrasing, paraphrasing, imitation and "creation" are all applied when translating advertising slogans. The nature of the slogan mainly determines which approach is to be used.

Translation theory is basically concerned with the faithful rendering of a source language text and the achievement of an almost exact equivalent in the target language. This, however, is not always required in the translation of advertising slogans where the emphasis is solely on the effectiveness of the slogan, i. e. where it is not important whether the meaning or the original words are retained or not. The essential thing is for the advertising slogan to attract the attention of consumers and to persuade them to buy the advertised product.

CONCLUSION

The translation of advertising slogans poses several problems to the translator. Wherever a slogan is based on stylistic-linguistic techniques such as rhyme, rhythm, play on words, idioms and others, the translator has to make use of his own creative skills to achieve an adequate, effective and persuasive recreation of the original advertising slogan. Very often, he is faced with the difficulty of having to adapt his words and ideas to the illustration of a specific product and is thus hampered in his creative originality.

An additional difficulty arises from the fact that countries not only differ in respect of languages but also in respect of customs, habits and culture. Thus, a slogan which is effective in one country may prove to be completely unsuccessful in another.

The use of loan words adds another problem to the translation of advertising slogans since they have a specific value in one language which they often do not have in another.

There is no specific rule or theory which could be applied to the translation of advertising slogans. The three basic classes of translation laid down in translation theory, namely, metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation, are all applicable to the translation of advertising slogans. Which of the three classes is to be applied in the translation of the slogan depends on the nature of the slogan itself.

The translator should, however, remember that it is the basic function of a slogan to persuade people to purchase a specific product and that this is achieved through certain linguistic techniques and through appeals to our subconscious needs. It is therefore sometimes better to create a completely new slogan and to capture the spirit of the message then to give a close and ineffective translation of the original which might lack the persuasive element of the message. The faithful rendering of the original is generally of minor importance. It is the effect of the slogan that counts.

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