

An Approach to the Translation of Brand Names

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Abstract—Brand name is an important part of the advertisement of a commodity. It is the symbol of the quality, characteristic and specification of the commodity. Brand names play an important part in the sales promotion of commodities. As a special intercultural activity, the translation of Brand names plays a more and more important part in international market competition. Yet it is no easy thing to transform brand names from one language to another one keeping the original style, charm and connotation. The translation of brand names is not only a process to find a counterpart in the target language, but also a process of re-creation, because different countries and nations have different cultural background. Based on many convincing examples, this paper introduces the characteristics and functions of brand names, states the principles of the translation of brand names, and offers the available and useful methods for the translation of brand names.

Index Terms—brand name, translation, principles, methods

I. INTRODUCTION

In the development of human society, the emergence of commodities gives rise to the birth of brand names. Brand names are the result of highly developed commodity economy. They form an important aspect of modern economic life. A brand name is the most prominent mark of a commodity, a good brand name can leave deep impression upon the mind of shoppers and can arouse their desires to buy the related commodity.

The import and export of commodities gives rise to the birth of translation of brand names. Nowadays, because of the globalization national boundaries are being surmounted, international cooperation and communication, especially business cooperation, import and export of commodities are strengthened. Whether the commodities can have a firm footing in the foreign market and be accepted by the consumers, thus building up good brand image lies in the qualified translation of brand names. In a sense, we can say that brand name means reputation. Because the translation of brand names is the re-entitlement of the commodity, it is very important for the sales of the goods.

Due to the acceleration of economy globalization and china's WTO membership, the interchanging of goods between China and other countries is becoming extensive. Companies, both domestic and abroad are busying adjusting their management strategy and market orientation in order to win the competition and occupy more international market. All of them face a problem in the competition, that is, how to introduce their own products better to the consumers in the target market. In the era of brand competition, the importance of brand name is outstanding. If China's corporations want to remain powerful in the international market, they should bringing brand strategy into effect, using the arms of brand names to exploit and occupy the market. A good brand name would have great but invisible influence on consumers, stimulate their purchasing desire and have unbelievable effect on sales promotion. If a commodity has a wonderful translation of brand name, then customers would be well-disposed towards it and consequently have a desire to buy it. While an unsuccessful translated brand name would not only bring economic loss to the company, but also damage the image of the company.

Thus, it is valuable to have a research on how to translate brand names properly. In this paper, following the introduction of the characteristics and functions of brand names, methods and principles that should be followed in the translation of brand names will be offered. Besides, problems arising in the process of translation of brand names will be analyzed and the solutions will be provided.

II. CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF BRAND NAMES

A. The Characteristics of Brand Names

Firstly, Brand name is the symbol of a product, so it usually suggests the attributes of a product or a commodity. For example, When we see the brand name “巧手”(literally means “deft hand”), we guess it might be related to washing powder, “五粮液”(literally means the “essence of five grains”) makes people think of the wine that is brewed from grain; while “蒙牛”(literally means “Mongolian cows”) can be associated with the milk from Inner Mongolia.

Secondly, as commodities are to be sold to consumers, their brand names should be common, popular, concise and easy to understand and remember. Therefore, there are many common words both in English and Chinese brand names, such as, “Camel, Tide, Stone, Bird, 将军, 金鸡, 小鸭” and so on (Chen, 1995, p.5-6).

Thirdly, Brand names are usually attractive in meaning so that when people read them beautiful images would come

into their minds (Wei, 1997). For example, the well-known beverage' brand name “可口可乐”(Coca Cola), “百事可乐”(Pepsi Cola), “雪碧”(Sprite); Cars' brand names “奔驰”(Benz), “皇冠”(Crown). The well-known washing machine manufactured by The Company of Panasonic is given a Chinese brand name “爱妻”(cherishing one's wife).

Fourthly, Brand names implies regional flavor. Some commodities' brand names bear the marks of the regions in which they are produced so as to raise the celebrity of the concerned places. For example, the two famous beer brand names implying the manufacturing places in China are “青岛啤酒”(Tsing Tao Beer) and “燕京啤酒”(Yangjing Beer).

B. *The Functions of Brand Names*

Brand Name is used to identify and distinguish a company's goods from those produced by others, so it has the feature of exclusiveness (Arnold, 1979). It belongs to the company's patent. When seeing the brand name, consumers can think of the producer. The goods that bears the same brand name are customarily regarded as coming from the same company. Identification is the basic function of brand name (Chen, 2000). The second function of brand name is to guarantee and supervise the quality of products. It is easier for administrative department and consumers to supervise the quality of the goods by means of checking the brand names. In order to maintain their own credit standing, producers would supervise each other through brand names, avoiding counterfeit products' turning up. Promoting sales is the third function of brand names. Brand name can give publicity to products' quality, function and reputation. Consumers get used to identifying goods by seeing brand names. The first impression of brand name has tempting effect or function. Brand name also has the function of legal protection. Usually brand names should be registered in trademark administrative department. Then the concerned company has the proprietary of the brand name. Any individual or company usurping the brand name without the permission of the proprietor will be charged with tort. Conclusively, using Brand names lawfully can avoid counterfeit products' turning up, protect corporations' rights, and promote the development of commodity economy (Chen, 2002)..

III. PROBLEMS DESERVING ATTENTION IN THE TRANSLATION OF BRAND NAMES

Firstly, some translated brand names do not conform to the aesthetic culture pertaining to target language and should be shunned (Dai, 2000). In any culture there have some taboos, and if we do not sense this point and violate such taboo rules in translating brand names, the sales of the concerned commodities would be affected. For example, In Chinese culture, dragon is the symbol of imperial power and nobility, so many brand names in China contain the character that means “dragon”; while in English culture dragon is an evil imaginary animal, and it arouse terror and aversion in people's mind. In traditional Chinese culture, “蝠” and “福” are a pair of homophones, so “蝙蝠”(bat) is considered as a symbol of good luck, and some products would use “蝙蝠” as their brand name. Yet in the western culture, “bat” is thought to be a kind of crazy and blind bloodsucker, having nothing to do with luck (Li, 1990). So commodities bearing such a Chinese brand name are unpopular in Britain. So, if we want to translate brand names properly to promote the sales of commodities in the international market, we should be familiar with the cultural differences between the original country and the target country.

Secondly, some translations of brand names bear political implications and should be avoided. For example, the brand name “大鹏” of Chinese canvas shoes is translated as ROC. It is without question that “大鹏”(roc) is regarded as a kind of holy bird both in Chinese and English myth, yet the capitalized English version “ROC” means the same with the abbreviated English form of “中华民国” (in English it is abbreviated as “ROC”), and such a translation is not allowed in terms of political perspective. The Chinese brand name “白熊” sometimes is habitually translated as “polar bear”, in such a case, the political implication of the English version is ignored. The appropriate translation of this brand name should be the plain version “White Bear” which can avoid political association.

Thirdly, some translated brand names are inelegant from the English cultural angle and should be guarded against. For example, a clock brand name “金鸡牌闹钟”, which is originated from the Chinese saying “雄鸡报晓” meaning that cock heralds the break of a day, was once translated as “Golden Cock Alarming Clock”. However, “cock” in English also refers to male reproductive organ and is regarded as a taboo word. Therefore, the above –said English translation of the brand name is not acceptable to English culture. The appropriate translation should be “Golden Rooster Brand Alarming clock”.

IV. PRINCIPLES FOR THE TRANSLATION OF BRAND NAMES

The purpose of brand names is to give publicity to commodities, stimulate consumption and boost the celebrity of the brand of the goods. In order to promote the sales of commodities, the translation of brand names should abide by the following principles.

Firstly, since all brand names have the common purpose of advising people to buy the goods through the introduction of them, the translation of brand names should be adequate in diction for the representation of the commodity's characteristics and functions (Tang, 2002). For example, the Germanic auto “Benz” was translated as “朋驰” or “本茨” in Taiwan, although this version is homophonic to the original name “Benz”, it sounds dull and lack of implied meaning. The present version of it in the mainland is “奔驰”, which is not only similar to the original pronunciation, but also

suggestive of the heroic flavor of this brand auto, thus impressing the buyers with the excellent performance of such cars.

Secondly, brand names translation should imply the use of the product. Whether the translated name can imply the use of the goods has an influence on the sales of the goods. The word “*Tide*” (a brand name for washing powder) literally means “trend”. However, translators translate it to “汰渍” creatively according to the use of the product, being consistent to its advertising slogan “污渍汗渍不留痕迹”(using “Tide” can ensure the complete disappearance of dirt and sweat stain). The translation skillfully implies the use of the product, and publicizes it successfully. Another example is “*Peak*” sports shoes. “Peak” can be literally translated as “巅峰”, “顶峰”. But translators transliterate it as “匹克”, which can remind people of “奥林匹克”(Olympic) (Liang, 1997), and naturally, the transliterated version is more impressive to consumers.

Thirdly, brand names translation should keep the original aesthetic value. A successful translated brand name can put a reader into a splendid artistic realm to arouse his/her interest (Wang, 2003). When translating brand names, translators should try their best to ensure the reappearance of the graceful artistic image of the original names. The original and the version are required to be not only similar in sound, but also similar in spirit. “*Diamond*” (a brand name of jewelry) has a Chinese name “戴梦得”. This name is transliterated from “*Diamond*”, and bears the meaning of “您梦寐以求的珠宝从这儿就可得到” (Here you can get the jewelry you have dreamed of.)

Another example is “Haier”. “Haier” is transliterated from “海尔” and is homophonous with “higher”. This translated brand name is easily associated with the advertisement of “Haier”: “*Haier; higher and higher*”.

Fourthly, the translation of brand names should accord with the target consumers’ cultural habit, including fashion, community psychology, public consciousness, moral criterion, religious tradition and so on. Different countries and areas have great differences in culture. Translators should pay more attention to cultural differences, avoiding misapprehension and antipathy. Many brand names have certain cultural connotations. People with different cultural backgrounds have different ideas about the same things because of the different moral criteria, religions, beliefs, and modes of thinking. As for the same color, plant, animal, maybe some countries prefer, while some not. If we leave this factor out of consideration, it would produce unexpected negative reaction. Shanghai “大白兔” milk candy is popular in China, but if it is literally translated as “White Rabbit” and sold to Australia, then it would receive negative reaction. As is known to all, Australia is famous for its livestock raising industry, but large number of rabbits draw holes all round, destroying grassland and rob food from flocks and herds. They are so disgusting there. So the translation of the brand name “White Rabbit” will not be popular there.

V. METHODS FOR THE TRANSLATION OF BRAND NAMES

A. Transliteration

Just as its name implies, transliteration means to find the translated name that has the nearest similar pronunciation to that of the original one in the target language (Huang, 2003). This method is used mostly in the translation of the brand names named after the names of people and places, because it is hard to find the denotative counterparts for these names in the target language, or the seemingly denotative counterparts are far less popular than the original ones. Transliteration method can be divided into three types:

Firstly, “sound to sound” pattern. In this case the original name is only regarded as the symbol of sound and shape and has no more deeper meaning, and the translated name just takes after the pronunciation of the original name and has no deeper meaning either, and usually the simulation of the original pronunciation is to impress the consumers with exotic flavor so as to arouse their curiosity and interest, thus stimulating their purchasing desire. For example, “*Christian Dior*” is translated as “克里斯第安迪奥” (brand name for woman toiletry), “*McDonald’s*” is translated as “麦当劳” (brand name for snack bar), and *Elizabeth* as “爱丽碧丝” (brand name for toiletry) (Ke, 2002).

Secondly, “sound to the combination of sound and meaning” pattern. In this case, the translator would choose the words for the translated name carefully to make it creative and attractive. But the pronunciation should have a similar pronunciation to the original one. If you are mindful, you may have noticed the Chinese version of the shampoo “*Top*”. Top means “顶”, but if it is translated as such Chinese consumers will feel strange. Then it is changed to “脱普”, which means transcendence. *Effetual* (brand name for face washing cream) is translated as “逸肤雪” (cream caressing you skin), *Tjoy* (brand name for face washing lotion) is translated as “丁家宜”. *Johnson* (brand name for baby lotion) as 强生 (healthy life), *Tylenole* (brand name for a Western medicine) as 泰诺 (ensuring your health), *Tick-Tock* (brand name for baby garment) as 淘淘 (lovely baby) and so on. The above translated brand names have the similarity both in pronunciation and meaning to the original ones.

Thirdly, “meaning to sound” pattern. In this case, the original brand names are words or phrases with actual meaning, but the translation just imitate the original sound in an acceptable way and discard the original meaning. “*Triumph*” (women underwear) and “*Sportsman*” (sports wear) are translated as “黛安芬” and “斯波兹曼” in the market.

B. Meaning-based Translation

Meaning-based translation means to find the appropriate and natural counterpart in the target language for the

translation according to the meaning of the original name to deliver the information to the consumers. This method is preferably used in the translation of brand names named after common words. Take the brand name “Pioneer” (先锋) as an example. The company uses it to show that it is the forerunner in the field of stereo instruments. And “先锋” in Chinese means a military official that leads others in march or fight. The original and the version have the same meaning, and give readers the same feeling. Meaning-based translation is also used when transliteration would bring misunderstanding. E.g., If “芳草” is transliterated as “Fangcao”, it would bring antipathy to target readers, because “fang” in English means venomous tooth of a snake and “cao” sounds like “chaos.”, so “Fragrance Grass” should be a better translation for this brand name. Some brand names can be translated both by transliteration method and free translation method, but we usually choose free translation method if it can bring consumers wonderful impression. “天使” can be translated as “Angel” rather than “Tianshi”, as “angel” is a familiar laudatory term in western countries, so do “凯歌”牌 (Triumphant) and “光明”牌 (Bright). In addition, the translation of many brand names named after flowers, animals or precious articles usually adopts free translation method, for instance, “葵花” (Sunflower), “百灵” (Lark), “海鸥” (Seagull), “熊猫” (Panda), “凤凰” (Phoenix), “钻石” (Diamond) and “小鸭” (Little swan) (Wang, 1997).

C. Combination of Transliteration and Free Translation

This method is a bit more difficult for translators to master and challenges their creative ability. It requires that the pronunciation of the translated name should be the same or close to the original one and its meaning can indicate the characteristic and function of the product (Dai, 2000). Consumers can have nice association from the pronunciation and meaning of the translated brand name. Combination of transliteration and free translation can display translators' skill most. For example, “Coca-Cola” is translated as “可口可乐”. According to its pronunciation “Coca” can be translated to “口科”, “口可” and so on. While as for beverage, people would attach importance to the feeling of the taste. So the translator grasped the characteristic of people's psychology, and by using free translation method translate it as “可口” which means “very pleasant to people's taste”. The second part is transliterated as “可乐”. The version “可口可乐” is very appropriate and natural. It sufficiently implies the characteristic and function of the beverage: it sure can give you nice flavor and pleasure. The brand name of a TV series called “美乐” is translated as “Melody” (fair-sounding music) which shows the euphonic sound of the TV thoroughly. It is really a perfect translation. Many brand names which were once translated with transliteration or literal translation method are now replaced with names translated by combination of transliteration and free translation. The world famous producer of electronic apparatus and notebook computers, Hewlett Packard Co's brand name is “Hewlett Packard”, which is abbreviated to “HP”. Its old translated name is “休利特—帕卡德”, but it was finally replaced by the brief version “惠普”. And “惠普” brings the association of “惠益普及” (the benefit extends to the populace) (Zhu, 2002). The widely-known sports shoes of “Nike” brand give the original native consumers the feeling of gracefulness and victory, because “Nike” is the goddess of victory in Greek mythology. While its Chinese version “耐克” as the result of combination of transliteration and free translation not only simulate the original pronunciation but also endue the brand a novel commendatory sense which implies that this brand shoes are wear-proof and durable. Other examples of this type are as follows:

“KODAK” (柯达) (film), “JSDA” (金时达) (timekeeper), “XEROX” (施乐) (electric appliance), “RIGOH” (理光) (multi-functional digital camera), “SAMPO” (新宝) (washing machine), it sounds like SHAMPOO (洗发水) (Xu, 2002). There are plenty of such coined trademarks, and more often than not they can not be found in bilingual dictionaries.

VI. CONCLUSION

As the international competition is becoming more and more intense, whether a brand name can be accepted by consumers and occupy the international market decides the fate of a company. We can not deny that advertisements play an important part in the sales promotion of the goods. Brand name is an important part of advertisement. Novel, particular, creative brand names can attract consumers quickly, and achieve unbelievable effect (Li, 2000). It will never be a easy mark to change brand names from one language to another and keep the original style, charm and connotation. The translation of brand names is not only a process to find a counterpart in the target language, but also a process of re-creation, because different countries and nations have different cultural backgrounds. Translators should not only understand the literal meanings of the original brand names precisely, sometimes they should also get rid of the hidebound conception of mechanical equivalence and translate the brand names creatively to attract more consumers. Therefore, the brand name translators should not only gain good command of the knowledge of the two languages and translation techniques, but should also improve their cultural awareness such as enterprises' cultural awareness and national cultural awareness, and master the relevant laws to do the work better.

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