

Strategies for Translating Vocative Texts

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Abstract

The paper deals with the linguistic and cultural elements of vocative texts and the techniques used in translating them by giving some examples of texts that are typically vocative (i.e. advertisements and instructions for use).

Semantic and communicative strategies are popular in translation studies and each of them has its own advantages and disadvantages in translating vocative texts. The advantage of semantic translation is that it takes more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text, while communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original text in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.

Focus is laid on the strategies used in translating vocative texts, strategies that highlight and introduce a cultural context to the target audience, in order to achieve their overall purpose, that is to sell or persuade the reader to behave in a certain way.

Thus, in order to do that, a number of advertisements from the field of cosmetics industry and electronic gadgets were selected for analysis. The aim is to gather insights into vocative text translation and to create new perspectives on this field of research, now considered a process of innovation and diversion, especially in areas as important as economy and marketing.

Key words: advertising, instructions, cultural context, semantic translation, communicative translation

Introduction

A comprehensive analysis of vocative text translation calls for definitions of the main concepts that will be discussed in the paper. On the one hand, the vocative function of language from the point of view of its usage, characteristics and typical examples of texts falling under this category will be looked into, and on the other hand, the procedures used in the translation of vocative texts will be analysed.

Therefore, the vocative function of language focuses on the readership/addressee/audience. Vocative may first be interpreted as “calling upon”, i.e. calling upon the addressee to act, think or feel, to

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respond in the way intended by the text. Its appeal is meant to be very direct [...] This function is also termed “conative” (denoting effort) and rhetorically, it could be considered a strategy of manipulation, of getting active agreement. (Vilceanu 2005: 49-50).

Advertisements represent a typical example of vocative texts we focused upon. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary an *advertisement* is a public announcement (formerly by the town crier, now usually in newspapers, on posters, on television, etc.) (2007: 33), with a paid message and an identified sponsor, that tries to persuade or influence the consumer to do something by using non-personal mass media in order to reach a large audience of potential consumers (Wells et al 2006: 5)

The concept of translation is also important for the purpose of our research. In this respect, the definition provided by Leviṭchi matches the study of this type of texts from the translation perspective: “To translate means to paraphrase, in other words to render from a source language into a target language, the possibility of such an activity being implied from the possibility of paraphrasing in the same language.” (2001: 9).

Since the cultural element is essential for such texts, we share Newmark’s opinion that culture “[...] is always the greatest barrier to translation” (2003: 13)

The above considerations are the starting point of our present research and, with that in mind, we can now engage into a deeper analysis of vocative texts translation.

1. Strategies of translation

This section of the paper attempts a brief analysis of the translation strategies used in the case of advertisements. As scholars suggest, there is no single method of translating a text, a clear-cut distinction being drawn between communicative and semantic translation. The two methods are overlapping, in the sense that an entire translation or even a particular section of it can be handled in a more communicative or less semantic way. The translation method also depends on the function of the translated text. (Newmark 1993: 10-11).

Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original keeping in mind that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership, while semantic translation focuses on the production of the

same contextual meaning of the original by taking into account the aesthetic value of the source language text (Newmark 1988: 45-47).

However, there is a difference between the two methods of translation. Communicative translation gives priority to the understanding and communication of the text while semantic translation is less likely to create an equivalent effect. Moreover, communicative translation relates itself to the addressee and is focused on the reader whereas semantic translation is focused on adequacy.

More recent studies reveal that, in the translation of vocative texts, a communicative method is preferred, firstly because it favours the informative aspect of the text, and secondly because of its perlocutionary effect on the target public (Lungu-Badea 2008: 145).

Other approaches to the translation of vocative texts include the process of copy adaptation, constrained translations and the functionalist approach. A major characteristic of the advertising discourse regards the extensive use of paralanguage (images, sounds, body gestures and so on) and the connotations of these signs vary depending on different cultures and need to be adapted, which is why Guy Cook suggests the translation of vocative texts involves copy adaptation (1992: 130).

In the same line of thought, Christina Schäffner considers that:

The translation of appellative or operative text types (e.g. advertising) aims to provoke in the target readers identical behavioural reactions to those of the reader of the source text, and the translation method called for is *adaptation* (2009: 116-7).

The second approach also refers to the multimodal character of advertisements, since they are made up of more than words and, in this case, the translation of the words is “constrained”.

Finally, the functionalist approach to translation is best summarized as follows:

It is not the source text as such, or its effects on the source text recipient, or the function assigned to it by the author, that determines the translation process and the linguistic make-up of the target text, as is postulated by equivalence-based translation theories, but the prospective function or purpose of the target text as determined by the initiator’s (i.e. client’s or commissioner’s) needs (Schäffner 2009: 116-7).

Nevertheless, we also consider the cultural elements of vocative texts and starting from the assumption that a translation involves not only two different languages but also two different cultures, we intend to determine whether the issue of culture is relevant in the translation of vocative texts.

Advertisements are focused on exploiting the desires and aspirations of the target public and suggest the existence of needs that can be fulfilled only by buying the product or service advertised. The messages carried out by the ads trigger different reactions depending on entities, individuals and communities. In other words, ads are "largely culture-specific" and "the handling of such messages in translation should be done with care" (Zamfira 2010: 212).

Two other relevant concepts in the case of advertising are: covert translation and cultural filter. A covert translation attempts to re-create an equivalent speech event via the use of a "cultural filter". Cultural filters are used to highlight the social and cultural differences in the behaviour and communication of individuals in the two speech communities focusing on the rhetorical styles and expectation norms in those communities. Therefore a text analysis is required before a translation, in order to identify these differences, and the overall conclusions should be drawn on the basis of a cultural research, not on the intuition of a translator (House 2001: 243-57).

2. Strategies used in the translation of advertisements

The most frequent strategies used in the translation of vocative texts were the purpose of our research, keeping in mind the linguistic and cultural elements related to this type of texts, as well as the ultimate goal of the advertising message, i.e. to sell the product. For this reason, focus is laid on creating an equivalent effect in the translation of the message and overcome aspects of fidelity, accuracy or the translator's imagination. For reasons of space, we limit our analysis to the two means of translation that we find most relevant in this study.

The first one is the strategy of chunking, which relates to the translators' capability of making associations when translating across cultures. Katan identifies three directions in which this strategy can be used: chunking up, chunking down and chunking sideways. As he puts it:

Chunking down is necessary for componential analysis to better understand the semantic field of, for example, individual words. [...]

With a view to cultural mediation, translators also need to be able to chunk up, above the individual and different cultures, to culture-inclusive frames. Finally, [...] mediators must be able to chunk sideways to find equivalent frames in the target culture. [2004: 147]

An interesting analysis regarding this concept was conducted by Zamfira in 2010, in an advertisement for watches manufactured by Burberry, which is a British luxury fashion house (235). The original ad found in the British Edition of the magazine *Glamour* included only the name of the brand (Burberry) and the noun “timepieces”. From a linguistic point of view, the noun “timepiece” has the following dictionary explanation: “old use a clock or watch” (Longman 2009: 1852). Zamfira explains the choice of this word by its “old use” quality, that stands out in comparison with the common word “watch”, which is semantically neutral. Moreover, she considers that the words *ceasuri* or *ceasornice* have the same status of being semantically neutral in Romanian, therefore they cannot render the same qualities as “timepieces”.

The translation suggested for this ad involves the use of the elliptical structure “*Demult măsoară timpul*”, because it does not express the subject, although it is clearly understood, and it refers to a “time measuring device”, in general terms. Furthermore, the word order of the sentence is also important: instead of placing the adverbial of time *demult* in final position, which is neutral, Zamfira placed it in initial position in order to stress it. In our opinion, she succeeded in underlining the temporal quality, by avoiding the denotations of a neutral word.

A final consideration on this translation refers to the original text, where the denotational level is dominant, while the connotational component is more subtle. In the Romanian variant, Zamfira switched things around (*demult* triggers the connotational level instantly, it is more striking); the connotational and denotational levels coexist both in the English and the Romanian texts, but they somehow vary in the degree of intensity. In other words, she managed to chunk up the translation by turning the stress from the denotational, immediate level to the connotational, more remote one.

The other concepts that need to be taken into account when analysing strategies of translation is the translation of proper names. In this respect, we share Guy Cook's opinion that by not translating the

name of a product, the effect in the target language will be different from the one in the source language (1992: 107).

Here the example provided by Zamfira is from an ad for a Coco Chanel perfume called "Mademoiselle" in the British Edition of *Elle* magazine². The linguistic elements, i.e. the words "COCO", "MADEMOISELLE" and "CHANEL" are reiterated next to the picture of the perfume bottle and that of a young woman. Zamfira notes that the denotation of the French noun "mademoiselle" is likely to be known by a large number of British consumers, namely "Miss", "an unmarried young woman". Moreover, she suggests this name keeps its connotations from French (freshness, youth, freedom etc.), but for the British public, connotations that derive from the idea of Frenchness are added: sophistication, beauty, sexual appeal, high fashion, tradition and quality in the making of perfumes etc.) (2010: 243).

We also note the case of perfume names that are not translated from the source language because their denotations are unlikely to be known by the target public and, in this case, only the connotations will function.

3. A practical analysis of translated texts

The corpus chosen for analysis includes four advertisements from the field of cosmetic industry found in a recent issue of the British magazine *Glamour*. We suggest a translation for each advertisement and attempt to underline the difficulties of translating this type of vocative texts into Romanian:

a) Now experience 100% poreless perfection - Dream Liquid Mousse Foundation. Liquid mousse air-whipped formula provides skin perfecting coverage/ Try new air-whipped liquid makeup for an *air-brushed* perfect finish/ Smooth, 100% poreless finish with natural luminosity / Air-brushed natural perfection/ Blends effortlessly for a flawless, air-brushed finish/ *Oil-free, Fragrance-free, Dermatologist Tested, Allergy Tested, Non- comedogenic - won't clog pores. / Safe for sensitive skin, good for all skin types.*

Suggested translation:

Experimentează acum perfecțiunea fără pori - Fond de ten spumă Dream Liquid / Fondul de ten se regăsește într-o spumă aerată ce oferă pielii acoperire perfectă/ Încearcă noul machiaj pe bază de spumă aerată pentru o finisare perfectă/ Catifelat, acoperă porii 100% oferind luminozitate naturală/ Perfecțiune naturală / Se amestecă ușor, pentru o finisare perfectă/ Nu conține ulei sau alcool, este testată dermatologic, nu astupă porii/ Indicat pentru pielea sensibilă, poate fi utilizat pentru toate tipurile de ten.

Here, the following comments are necessary: the compounding method - air-brushed, oil-free, fragrance-free is a highly productive means of word formation in contemporary English unlike Romanian. A graphic synonymy is also found: 100% which resembles a mathematical formula, being a more convincing device. The use of expert testimony and scientific terms: Dermatologist Tested, Allergy Tested are made to create the feeling of trust.

b) Pure color, weightless feel -Mineral Power Lipcolor/ It's lipcolor with everything you want, nothing you don't. / Mineral Power Lipcolor has pure *micro-minerals* for a natural yet noticeable color with a *soft-shine* finish./ Discover the goodness of micro-minerals in lipcolor:/ Our formula, with micro-minerals is clinically proven to improve the condition of the lips up to 62%/ Pure color, weightless feel / Enriched with shea butter and jojoba oil to leave lips smooth and supple/ No heavy waxes / No *preservatives* / No fragrance.

Suggested translation:

Culoare pură, senzație ușoară – Ruj Mineral Power / Este un ruj care conține tot ce îți dorești și nimic din ceea ce nu îți dorești. / Rujul Mineral Power conține micro-minerale pure pentru o culoare naturală, însă vizibilă și un finisaj fin și strălucitor. / Descoperă beneficiile micro-mineralelor în ruj: /Formula noastră, cu micro-minerale dovedește clinic îmbunătățirea aspectului buzelor cu până la 62% / Culoare pură, senzație ușoară / Îmbogățit cu unt de cacao și ulei de jojoba pentru a lăsa buzele catifelate și mătăsoase / Nu conține ceară în exces / Nu conține conservanți / Nu conține parfum.

Comments: The compounding method: micro-minerals, soft-shine is a highly productive means of word formation in contemporary English unlike Romanian. We also find an expert testimony: clinically proven as strategy of manipulation highly effective in Romanian, too. We have the false friend: *preservatives*, translated in Romanian as *conservanți*. / The English word *fragrance* vs. the Romanian *parfum* is a case of semantic loss.

c) Discover the power of micro-minerals - Mineral Power. A new flawless, alive with good health/ Experience complete yet traceless coverage that creates a *natural luminosity*. / *Natural luminosity*, Increased skin clarity... / Make-up reinvented, Your skin transformed...

Suggested translation:

Descoperă puterea micro-mineralelor – Mineral Power / O nouă formulă fără imperfecțiuni, plină de vitalitate și de sănătate / Experimentează acoperirea completă și fără urme, ce creează o luminozitate naturală / Luminozitate

naturală, claritate sporită a pielii.. / Machiajul reinventat, pielea ta transformată...

Comments: In this advertisement we find repetition, which is preserved in Romanian: *natural luminosity*; the cultural stereotype both in English and Romanian: *good health*. The compounding method (*micro-minerals*) is a highly productive means of word formation in contemporary English unlike Romanian.

d) Colossal lashes in just one coat! – The Colossal Volum express Creates 9X *the volume*, instantly / Patented MegaBrush + Collagen Formula plump lashes one by one / *Dramatic Volume with no clumps* / Washable

Suggested translation:

Gene colosale cu doar o aplicare – The Colossal Volum Express / Volum de 9 ori mai mare, instantaneu./ Peria brevetată + Formula cu colagen măresc genele considerabil/ Volum suprinzător fără încărcare/ Se curăță ușor.

The first part of the ad resembles a mathematical formula, being a more convincing device. *9X the volume* – is a graphic synonymy (as in u2, Xmas), in order to improve reading efficiency, but also to challenge the audience in search for the right meaning. *Fără să încarce genele* – explicitation not to create a negative image or ambiguity.

Conclusions

We note that the translation method used in all the advertisements is communicative translation; therefore, the form differs to a certain degree in each text, because our intention was to secure the general semantics of the advertised message.

The practical analysis revealed a set of particular traits such as: semantic loss in translation, a highly intense use of the compounding method, cultural stereotypes, expert testimonies and scientific terms, which prove to be highly persuasive in the construction of advertisements and may cause difficulties when translated into Romanian.

The strategies used when dealing with this type of texts are an overall view in relation to the linguistic and cultural elements of vocative texts and the techniques used in translating them.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by Project SOP HRD - PERFORM /159/1.5/S/138963.

Notes

¹ In the original: "A traduce înseamnă a parafraza, a reda cu alte cuvinte, dintr-o limbă-sursă într-o limbă-țintă, posibilitatea unei asemenea activități fiind subînțeleasă din posibilitatea parafrazării într-o aceeași limbă."

² For further details on the features of the *advertising discourse* see Zamfira (2010).

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