Translating advertisements from Chinese to English: Strategies and methods

Rong Jiang*
School of Foreign Language, Communication University of China, Nanjing, Nangjing Jiangsu, China

Abstract: This study explores the strategies and methods of translating advertisements from Chinese to English. It adopts a functional approach to translation studies, encompassing the Skopos theory and equivalent translation theory. The translation strategies are divided into semantic, structural, language, and rhetorical levels. At the semantic level, the use of literal translation, liberal translation, and semantic conversion is employed to convey both the literal meaning and intended meaning of the advertisements. At the structural level, supplementary translation, condensed translation, and the division and merging of sentences are utilized to adjust the structure to meet the translation requirements. At the language level, extensive use of adjectives, frequent use of imperative verbs, and personal pronouns are employed to highlight features, prompt actions, and establish connections. At the rhetorical level, the use of puns, simulation, personification and exaggeration is employed to enhance interest, convey messages, and imbue products with human-like qualities. By employing a functional approach and various translation strategies, advertisements can be effectively translated, capturing the interest and resonance of the target audience. However, this study has certain limitations in terms of sample selection and research scope. Future research can further explore additional translation strategies and methods to improve the effectiveness and quality of advertisement translation.

1. Functional approach to translation studies

The paper's chosen method for Translation Studies is the functional approach, which encompasses Skopos theory and Equivalent translation theory as its two main aspects.

1.1 Skopos theory

Skopos theory is a translation theory proposed by German scholar Vermeer in the 1970s. Vermeer freed translation research from the constraints of the original text centered theory, believing that translation must follow the principles of purpose, coherence, and fidelity, with the principle of purpose being the primary principle, which states that "any translation behavior is determined by the purpose of translation, that is, the purpose of translation determines the means of translation" (Munday 2012: 122) [1].

When it comes to advertising translation, the ultimate goal is to promote products and services to potential consumers and generate economic benefits. To achieve the best advertising effect, translators can follow Skopos theory and employ appropriate translation methods that align with the characteristics of the products and services they are promoting. This will enable them to effectively convey the intended message to the target audience and maximize the impact of their advertising efforts.

1.2 Equivalent translation theory

The Equivalent translation theory, which was introduced by the American translator Eugene A. Nida in the early 1940s, holds that translation should focus on functional equivalence rather than simply adhering to the form and structure of the source language[2]. In this theory, Nida pointed out that "translation is the use of the most appropriate, natural, and equivalent language to reproduce the information of the source language from semantics to style". Nida's definition of translation indicates that it involves not only lexical equivalence, but also semantic, stylistic, and formal equivalence. Translation conveys information that includes not only surface lexical information but also deep cultural information. The "dynamic equivalence" proposed by Nida includes four aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, discourse equivalence, and stylistic equivalence. Among these aspects, Nida believes that "meaning is the most important, followed by form".

Therefore, Nida's equivalent translation theory emphasizes the importance of achieving functional equivalence in translation, taking into account not only the lexical meaning, but also the cultural nuances, style, and intended function of the source text[3].

In advertising translation, the theory of equivalent translation is useful in guiding translators to choose appropriate translation strategies and ensure that the
translated text can achieve similar advertising, promotional, and sales effects in the target language, while considering the expression and functional requirements of the original text and the language habits and cultural background of the target language. By doing so, the translated text can be more readable and acceptable, effectively achieving the goals of advertising translation, promotion, and sales.

2. Translation strategies

The importance of advertising translation lies in its direct impact on the dissemination effect and efficiency of advertising. Advertising is one of the most important means in commercial marketing, with the aim of promoting the sale of products or services. The translation of advertisements involves transforming the information, language, and culture of advertisements into a form that the target audience can understand and accept, which is crucial for the successful dissemination of advertisements. Therefore, selecting appropriate translation strategies is crucial for the effectiveness of advertising communication.

2.1 Semantic level

In terms of semantics, advertising translation requires accuracy, attractiveness, alignment with the target culture and brand positioning, while also striving to preserve the original ad's creativity and personality. Translators need to fully grasp the semantic meaning of the original ad, apply appropriate translation strategies and techniques to ensure that the translated semantics remain consistent with the original ad and achieve the desired effect.

2.1.1 Use of literal translation

The use of literal translation in advertising translation helps to maintain the original flavor, preserve the vocabulary and sentence structure of the source text, and accurately convey the advertising message. It also aims to retain the creativity and personality of the original ad, ensuring that the translated ad maintains the same style and expression, thus enhancing its effectiveness and impact.

(1) ST: 谁跑得最长, 谁笑得最好。
TT: He laughs best, who runs longest.

The example 1 is a tire advertisement. In the target text (TT), the translator preserves the original advertisement's expression style and sentence structure through a literal translation method, ensuring that the advertisement maintains a similar style in the target language. This helps maintain the coherence and consistency of the brand image.

Additionally, the use of literal translation emphasizes durability and endurance. The translation of "who runs longest" conveys the concept of durability and reliability, implying that the promoted tires have durable and reliable performance to support long-term usage. This aligns with the advertisement's objective of emphasizing product durability and long-lasting effects to attract potential consumers' attention.

Furthermore, the literal translation retains the original advertisement's metaphors and emotive power, enabling the translated advertisement to convey the same emotions and effects. The literal translation conveys the implicit connection between "running the longest" and "smiling the best," allowing readers to make corresponding associations in their minds, thereby increasing the advertisement's appeal and impact.

2.1.2 Use of liberal translation

In advertising translation, translators often use the method of liberal translation to evoke emotional resonance in the audience, making it easier for them to develop an interest in the product or service. At the same time, it helps to adapt to different cultural backgrounds and ensures that the advertising message is accurately understood and accepted by the target audience. The use of liberal translation gives translators greater creative space, enabling them to express the advertising content in a more appealing and personalized manner. Through liberal translation, advertising can establish memory and recognition in the target market, enhancing the consistency and recognition of the brand image on a global scale.

(2) ST: 黑妹牙膏, 强健牙龈, 保护牙齿。
TT: Do not show me any other, but show me Black Sister.

In the ST of example 2, The original phrase "黑妹牙膏", refers to a specific brand of toothpaste, and a literal translation into English may not accurately convey the specific meaning and cultural background of the brand. In the TT, through the use of liberal translation, the translator transforms it into "show me Black Sister" to convey the brand name and theme, which is more likely to resonate with English readers. Moreover, "Show me Black Sister" has a unique expression in English that may evoke readers' interest and curiosity on a subconscious level, making it more likely to capture their attention to the product.

(3) ST: 创新不断, 才能时刻超前。
TT: To stay ahead you must have your next idea waiting in the wings.

The example 3 is an advertisement promoting Audi cars. By using liberal translation, the advertisement can effectively convey the core values and philosophy of the Audi brand in a way that is more easily understood by English readers. The phrase “创新不断” in the ST is translated as "have your next idea waiting in the wings". This translation captures the essence of the brand's pursuit and emphasizes the importance of continuous innovation and staying ahead. It aligns better with the language and cultural background of English readers, while maintaining the appeal and effectiveness of the advertisement. Such a translation enables the advertisement to resonate more easily with English readers, stimulating their interest and attention towards Audi vehicles.
2.1.3 Use of semantic conversion

The use of semantic conversion method can help advertisements convey information more naturally within the cultural context of the target language. Certain English words may not have a direct equivalent in Chinese or may have subtle differences in meaning across different cultural backgrounds. Through semantic conversion, one can select vocabulary and expressions that align better with the target language readers' understanding and habits, making the advertisement more easily comprehensible and acceptable.

(4) ST: 蚊子杀，杀，杀。
TT: Mosquito bye, bye, bye.

The example 4 is a mosquito repellent advertisement. By employing semantic conversion, the TT successfully conveys the essence of the original Chinese advertisement to the English-speaking target audience. Instead of a straightforward translation like "Mosquito kill, kill, kill", the creatively adapted phrase "Mosquito bye, bye, bye" effectively captures the concept of eliminating mosquitoes in a more engaging and emotionally resonant manner. This approach fosters a stronger connection with the audience and reinforces the intended message of the advertisement. As a result, the advertisement becomes more relatable and memorable to English readers, ensuring effective communication of the product's benefits and features. Furthermore, the repetition of "bye, bye, bye" adds a rhythmic and playful tone to the translation, making it more engaging and memorable for the audience. This type of expression is more likely to grab the attention of English readers and leave a lasting impression.

(5) ST: 吸烟请到吸烟区。
TT: No smoking except in the designated smoking area.

The example 5 is a public service advertisement slogan in an airport waiting room. The ST aims to inform everyone that smoking is prohibited in the waiting room and smokers should use the designated smoking area. However, a direct translation of the ST as "The passengers who smoke, please go to the smoking area" not only fails to convey the message of smoking prohibition but also seems to encourage passengers to smoke. In order to accurately convey the intended meaning, the translator employed semantic conversion in the TT and translated the original text into a highly authentic English expression.

2.2 Structural level

In Chinese-to-English advertising translation, there are certain cases where the original text may contain additional information or details that need to be supplemented in the translation process to ensure that the translated text conveys the same meaning and effect as the original. Supplementary translation can enhance the attractiveness and persuasiveness of the advertisement, making the translation more culturally and linguistically relevant to the target audience. Furthermore, there are instances where it is necessary to condense and streamline the information from the original text within a limited space. Through condensed translation, lengthy sentences or paragraphs can be compressed into concise and clear expressions, retaining the key information while ensuring the conciseness and appeal of the advertisement. Additionally, there are times when it is necessary to divide or merge sentences from the original text to adapt to the grammar structure and expression conventions of the target language. The division and merging of sentences as a translation method can make the translated text more in line with English grammar norms, while improving readability and fluency. Overall, these structural changes in translation methods can help ensure the accuracy, fluency, and persuasiveness of advertising translation. They can adapt to the characteristics and cultural backgrounds of the target language while maintaining the original intent, making the advertisement more attractive and impactful, thereby achieving the desired promotional effect.

2.2.1 Use of supplementary translation

The use of supplementary translation is a method of adding and supplementing translation content to meet the needs of the target language audience. Due to the different expressions, language habits, and ways of thinking between Chinese and English, in the process of advertising translation, in order to make the translation more in line with the pragmatic habits, context, and cultural background of the target language, the translator needs to add some sentences, phrases, or words to enable the target language audience to more accurately understand and accept the meaning of the translation.

(6) ST: 溪口千层饼采用传统工艺，制作精细，质地松脆，清香可口。
TT: Xikou Qiangceng Cake, with numerous clear sheets in it, is finely made in a traditional way. It is tasty and crisp.

The underlined part in the ST of example 6, "千层饼," was not translated literally as "thousand and sheets cake," but instead, the translator chose to use transliteration, rendering it as "Qianceng." This approach preserves the original sound and essence of the Chinese name. Besides, the translator employed supplementary translation to provide additional information about the cake——"with numerous clear sheets in it", which can arouse the interest of foreign readers and entice them to try it. By using supplementary instructions, the translator was able to effectively convey the seductive message of the original text to a foreign audience.

(7) ST: 拥有力莱纤维，就拥有最优美舒适的丝袜。
TT: Lilion, the finest yarn that makes your stocking look beautiful and feel smooth.

In the Example 7, the translator provides additional information and details for the term "力莱" in the ST to ensure that the translated text conveys the same meaning and effect as the original. "力莱" is a specific product or brand name that may not have a direct equivalent in English. By offering supplementary translation, the translator can provide readers with more information about the product, enabling them to understand its
features and value. This approach enhances the accuracy and completeness of the translation, while also boosting the attractiveness of the advertisement, as readers can access more specific and relevant information that is likely to draw their attention to the product's advantages. Furthermore, the translator assists readers in better understanding the connection between "力莱" and the most beautiful and comfortable stockings, aiming to engage the target audience and increase their interest and identification with the product.

2.2.2 Use of condensed translation

Advertising is often limited by space or time constraints, so using condensed translation helps ensure that the advertising message is conveyed within the given limitations. By simplifying and compressing the language expression, more core information can be delivered within the limited space while maintaining clarity and impact. Through condensed translation, the advertising message can be condensed into a more attractive and memorable form, aiding the audience in better remembering the content. By distilling the information to its core essence, the primary purpose and intention of the advertisement can be communicated more effectively, without relying excessively on specific cultural or linguistic details.

Additionally, English grammar and expression may differ from Chinese, so dividing sentences into smaller units allows for better adaptation to English structure. On the other hand, Chinese information may be spread across multiple sentences, whereas English often consolidates related information into a single sentence. By merging sentences, the advertising message can be conveyed more clearly, avoiding redundancy and ensuring a concise and impactful advertisement. This process also ensures grammatical correctness and fluency, as Chinese and English have differences in word order, vocabulary choice, and grammar rules. By appropriately dividing and merging sentences, advertisements become more readable, engaging, and able to deliver a clear message within a limited timeframe.

(8) ST: 12型手扶拖拉机具有结构简单，耐用可靠，容易操作，马力大，重量轻，通用性能好等优点，并备有乘坐装置，可以坐着耕作。

TT: Model-12 two-wheel tractor is recognized for its simple structure, reliability, long service life, easy operation, ample output, light weight and versatility, and is equipped with a riding installation.

In the source text (ST) of example 8, the underline parts "备有乘坐装置" and "可以坐着耕作" have the same meaning. Therefore, the translator applied a condensed translation method in the TT, omitting the latter phrase while retaining the key information, achieving a concise and impactful effect in the translation. By condensing the translation, the translator streamlined the expression within the limited space, eliminating redundancy and repetition from the original text, resulting in a more concise and compelling advertising message.

Through condensed translation, the TT becomes more concise and to the point, making it easier for readers to accept and understand. It effectively conveys the core message within a limited space, making the advertisement more impactful and attention-grabbing. Furthermore, it improves the readability and fluency of the advertisement, ensuring compliance with English grammar norms.

2.2.3 Division and merging of sentences

The division and merging of sentences are crucial in the process of translating Chinese advertisements into English. Chinese sentences are often longer than their English counterparts, and breaking them down into shorter units enhances readability and comprehension. Additionally, English grammar and expression may differ...
2.3.1 Extensive use of adjectives

The inclusion of a greater number of adjectives in advertising translation offers several advantages. It enables the highlighting of product features, creating a more impactful impression on the target audience. Secondly, it establishes emotional connections with the audience, increasing the likelihood of a positive response. Thirdly, adjectives facilitate comparison and contrast, setting the product apart from competitors. Lastly, the use of descriptive adjectives enhances brand recall and recognition, fostering greater brand loyalty and awareness. Together, these benefits synergistically enhance the overall effectiveness of advertising translation.

(10) ST: 柴油机体积小，重量轻，运转平稳。

TT: Diesel engine has small volume, light weight and stable running.

In the ST of the example 10, it uses the adjectives "小" "轻" and "平稳", and the translator also emphasizes these three aspects in the translation. In the target text (TT) of, the adjectives of "small", "light" and "stable" serve the purpose of capturing potential customers’ attention and generating interest in the product. By employing vivid and captivating adjectives, advertisements can differentiate themselves from competitors and grab the target audience’s focus. These adjectives offer brief descriptions that enable potential customers to comprehend the product’s features and benefits. Therefore, utilizing adjectives effectively helps consumers form initial impressions of the product, stimulating their curiosity and motivating them to explore and make a purchase.

2.3.2 Frequent use of imperative verbs

The frequent use of imperative verbs in the English translation of advertisements serves to emphasize actions and provide direct instructions to readers or audiences, urging them to take specific actions.[10] Imperative verbs play a vital role in guiding and influencing consumer decision-making within the context of advertisements by explicitly prompting the audience to act.

(11) ST: 地毯商店举办地毯展销，提供各种手织地毯，欢迎前来参观稀世珍品----中国精美华丽的地毯。

TT: A Carpet Display and Sale Sponsored by a Carpet Shop offers a variety of hand-knitted woollen carpets. Come and visit an exotically luxurious world of Chinese charm and beauty.

In the target text (TT) of example 11, the translator adds imperative verbs “come” and “visit” in the underlined part to encourage audience participation and interaction. By urging them to come and visit, it establishes a sense of engagement with the audience, fostering a stronger connection between products and consumers. This interactive approach prompts the audience to actively engage with the advertisement, leading to increased product awareness. In addition, it creates a clear and direct tone that can stimulate their interest and initiative, motivating them to engage in purchasing, participating, or trying out the product.

2.3.3 Skillful use of personal pronouns

In advertising translation, the use of personal pronouns such as "you" or "we" establishes a personalized connection with the audience, allowing potential customers to feel involved and enhancing the appeal of the advertising message. This personalized approach creates a direct sense of closeness. Additionally, the use of personal pronouns individualizes the advertising message, making it more targeted. By treating potential customers as individuals, it generates a sense of importance and relevance, which contributes to increasing the effectiveness of the advertisement. Furthermore, when personal pronouns are used in advertisements, it becomes easier for people to relate them to themselves, creating emotional resonance. This strengthens their attention and interest in the advertising message, encouraging a more active response to the call-to-action.

(12) ST: 为您的家人每天提供七种重要好处，只需享用美味的达能酸奶。了解以下好处，看看您如何帮助您所爱的人过上更健康的生活方式!

TT: You can give your family seven important benefits every day just by serving delicious yogurt, Dannon Yogurt. To see how you can help your loved ones live a healthier lifestyle, take a look at the benefits below!

In the TT of the example 12, the translator retained the personal pronoun "您" from the ST, and the second-person pronouns "you" and "yours" are repeatedly used in the TT. It reads as if a friend is warmly introducing Dannon yogurt to consumers and their family, creating a sense of familiarity. By using personal pronouns, this yogurt advertisement is able to stimulate consumers' active participation. This direct interaction with consumers encourages them to take action or experience the product.

2.4 Rhetorical Level

The application of rhetorical devices is a common translation strategy in advertising translation. Rhetorical devices can provide advertisements with more vivid, unique, and creative expressions, thus enhancing their attractiveness and impact. Through the use of devices such as puns, simulation, and personification, advertisements can leave a deep impression on readers or viewers, enhancing their memorability and credibility.[11] Moreover, rhetorical devices in advertising translation help to convert the original text's creativity and expression into equivalent expressions in the target language. By flexibly employing corresponding rhetorical devices, translators can effectively convey advertising messages to target audiences, overcoming language and cultural barriers. Additionally, rhetorical devices can endow advertisements with distinctive personality and style, helping brands establish a unique, interesting, and standout image. By skillfully utilizing rhetorical devices, advertisements can showcase brand creativity, intelligence, and distinctive characteristics, thereby enhancing brand awareness and loyalty.
2.4.1 Use of puns

(13) ST: 道路不沾水，司机更安全；司机不沾酒，道路更安全。

TT: The driver is safer when the road is dry; The road is safer when the driver is dry.

The example 13 is a traffic promotion advertisement. The ST contains two meanings: Roads are free from water, making drivers safer; Drivers do not get drunk, making roads safer. In the target text (TT), the translator uses the rhetorical device of pun: the word "dry" carries a semantic pun. In the first sentence, "dry" refers to the absence of water, indicating dry road conditions. In the second sentence, "dry" implies that the driver abstains from alcohol. In this context, "dry" is translated as "no water" and "no alcohol," respectively, retaining the parallel form of the original text.

2.4.2 Use of simulation

In advertising translation, the use of the simulation approach is frequently employed, with the most common being the simulation of proverbs from the target language to translate the original advertisement. Proverbs serve as commonly used expressions in the target culture, enabling resonance and connection with the target audience, thereby enhancing the cultural affinity of the advertisement. Moreover, proverbs often carry emotions and wisdom, capable of triggering emotional resonance in the target audience, making the advertisement more appealing and impactful. Additionally, proverbs are typically concise, refined, and easy to remember, enabling them to leave a lasting impression in the minds of the target audience, thereby enhancing the advertisement's memorability. By utilizing proverbs or idioms from the target language, advertisements can effectively convey features and information into a more easily comprehensible and relatable form. By personifying the product or service and portraying it as an entity with human characteristics and behaviors, it becomes more accessible for potential customers to understand and remember the relevant information. Consequently, the conveyed message becomes clearer, more succinct, and facilitates purchase decisions. Moreover, personification adds a human touch to the product or brand, allowing consumers to establish a stronger emotional connection by associating themselves with the depicted human traits, desires, and emotions. Additionally, by personifying the product or brand, a distinctive and captivating brand image can be crafted. This image enhances the product or brand's vividness and memorability in consumers' minds, thereby fostering brand loyalty and identification.

(15) ST: 她工作，你休息。

TT: She works while you rest.

The example 15 is an advertisement promoting a washing machine. It employs personification, personifying the washing machine. The phrase "she works" contrasts with "you rest," creating two contrasting scenes: the washing machine can help consumers share the household chores, while consumers can leisurely enjoy life. By personifying the washing machine as "she," the translator implies the machine's effort and dedication during its work, aligning with the consumer's life, and enhancing the consumer's emotional identification with the product. By describing the washing machine with human characteristics as "she," the message directly conveys that the washing machine provides convenience to consumers while allowing them to relax, making the advertisement easier to understand and remember. Additionally, by personifying the washing machine as a hardworking woman, the advertisement portrays a reliable, diligent, and caring brand image, which increases consumer trust and affinity towards the brand.

2.4.3 Use of personification

In Chinese-to-English advertising translation, utilizing personification can help simplify complex product features and information into a more easily understandable and relatable form. By personifying the product or service and portraying it as an entity with human characteristics and behaviors, it becomes more accessible for potential customers to understand and remember the relevant information. Consequently, the conveyed message becomes clearer, more succinct, and facilitates purchase decisions. Moreover, personification adds a human touch to the product or brand, allowing consumers to establish a stronger emotional connection by associating themselves with the depicted human traits, desires, and emotions. Additionally, by personifying the product or brand, a distinctive and captivating brand image can be crafted. This image enhances the product or brand's vividness and memorability in consumers' minds, thereby fostering brand loyalty and identification.

(16) ST: "葵花"电扇，清凉无限。

TT: “Sunflower” fan, fans away the sun.

Exaggerated translation can stand out among a sea of advertisements, capturing the attention of potential consumers. It can grab their eyeballs and pique their curiosity about the ad content. By employing exaggerated adjectives, adverbs, and phrases, the translation can leave a lasting impression of the product or service in consumers' minds. Through the use of an exaggerated linguistic style, the advertisement can differentiate itself, establishing the brand's uniqueness and personality, thus building brand recognition and fostering consumer identification.

The example 16 is a fun advertisement. The ST uses the exaggerated phrase "清凉无限 "to describe the immense power and excellent cooling effect of the fan. The translator, with a rich imagination, employs a unique and exaggerated approach in the TT, translating "清凉无限 " as "fans away the sun" ----sweeping away the scorching sun. This translation evokes the idea that the "Sunflower" fan can provide an incredibly comfortable
cooling sensation during the sweltering summer days, emphasizing the powerful cooling effect of the product. By using such an exaggerated expression, the "Sunflower" fan leaves a distinct impression, establishing the brand's uniqueness and personality, contributing to brand recognition and consumer identification.

3. Conclusion and limitation

The utilization of a functional approach and diverse translation strategies can lead to the successful translation of advertisements, effectively captivating the attention and connection of the intended recipients. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, specifically regarding sample selection and research scope. Future research endeavors should aim to delve deeper into additional translation strategies and methodologies, with the objective of enhancing the efficacy and caliber of advertisement translation.

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References