TECHNIQUES FOR THE TRANSLATION OF ADVERTISING SLOGANS

Lavinia Dan (Nădrag)
Prof., PhD, ”Ovidius” University of Constanța

Abstract: This paper demonstrates that translating advertising slogans is a very important communication area and a major challenge in the translation of printed advertisements. Slogans are part of communication and thus, their message is essential for companies in the process of advertising their products and services. Slogans often play on the double meaning of words, making the message difficult to understand. The use of ambiguity and connotative meanings of words can lead to multiple interpretations of the slogans and can evoke humor. When translating advertising texts, the translator’s main purpose is to transmit a message that would produce the same impact on almost all the readers of the target text. The translator should be concerned both with the translation of the source text elements and with transmitting the source text message. The creativity of the advertising language makes the translator become a text writer. Thus, the target text itself becomes a new and original text, an instance of communication between the target text and the target readers.

Keywords: slogans, translation, advertising, translation techniques, message

Definitions of and reasons for advertising

According to the American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language (2011), advertising is: 1. The activity of attracting public attention to a product or business, as by paid announcements in the print, broadcast, or electronic media; 2. The business of designing and writing advertisements; 3. Advertisements considered as a group. Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged (1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003) provides the following definitions: 1. (Marketing) the promotion of goods or services for sale through impersonal media, such as radio or television; 2. (Marketing) the business that specializes in creating such publicity; 3. advertisements collectively; publicity.

Advertisements represent an important part of advertising, they consist of pictures, sets of words, short films which are intended to persuade people to buy a product or use a service, or they give information
about different events or campaigns. Over the years, they have become an instrument to manipulate social values and attitudes, being less focused on the basic function of communicating information about goods and services.

Nowadays, the demand for advertisements has increased. According to Judith Williamson (1978:75), “advertisements do not only sell goods and services but they are commodities themselves”. The purpose of ad copywriters is not only to promote goods and services but also to entertain the public and to influence attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. For example, advertising promotes campaigns for education, health, environment or social campaigns. Williamson also considers advertising “the official art” of the advanced industrial nations of the west. Advertisements can be found everywhere in cities, making advertising an institution involving artists, writers, film directors, and being supported by the mass media.

Leiss et al. (2005) argues that advertising has, besides its basic role of promoting goods and services, new purposes, like transmitting new messages to the target public: interpersonal and family relations, the sense of happiness and contentment, sex roles and stereotyping, the fading away of cultural traditions, influences on younger generations, the role of business in society, persuasion and personal autonomy and others.

**The major elements of communication in advertising**

The mass communication phenomenon is an activity through which one or more persons interact with another group of individuals to transmit a signification with the help of symbols. The mass communication phenomenon appeared because it was considered the most efficient way to interact with the needs of the society. In the literature of this domain, at least four notions are brought into discussion: the sender, the receiver, the message and the channel (media). This functional model of collective information can also be applied to advertising.

In advertising, the sender is represented by the advertiser. The sender codifies the ad with the help of editors, designers, photographers, copywriters and researches. The research implies the determination of the value that has to be sent and the codification of the message into symbols. Culture plays an important role in copywriting as well.

Copywriting is referred to as “the art of writing selling messages” (Jefkins, 2000:203). Their purpose is to provoke the intended attention, interest, desire, conviction and action. Copywriters use an ensemble of techniques to create the desired persuasive message, e.g. pictures, creative writing design, attractive colors. Jefkins states that the entire work for writing an advertisement should be a team work. The design and layout can help the copywriter give a stronger meaning to the words of the advertisement. The pictures and the typography (for example, larger fonts) emphasize and support the message of an ad.
Another purpose of ad copywriters is to emphasize the brand image, its quality and superiority in comparison with other products or services available in the market.

The public (or the audience – the receiver) is made of the people who see or hear the advertisements. The result of the communication process, i.e. to buy or to reject a product depends on the decoding phase. This phase involves: the perception and understanding of the message, its reading or listening, but also the assimilation of the presented symbols. In order to decode the message, the receiver has to understand the literal meaning of the words, or the meaning that lies behind the words. The pictures, the design, the layout and the typography work as symbols and are connected to the written text, because they are part of the message transmitted by an ad.

The message plays a major role in influencing the consumer. In other words, the transmitted message might be of greater importance than the product. The symbolic significance of the product, the values that are artificially placed in a coherent image are of great importance for the advertiser and also for the client, in order to satisfy a need. Suggestive advertising brings the functional purpose of products on second place and highlights their symbolic and imaginary significance. Other types of symbols which transmit a message are the graphic symbols of brands.

In order to increase consumption of a product or service through the creation of the “brand image” and “brand loyalty”, the producers constantly keep in touch with the mass public either to persuade them or to remind them about the products they sell.

The press is the oldest and the most traditional channel, used for its harmonious style (image and content) and especially for its segmentation capacity (daily newspapers or magazines, national or local newspapers, feminine press, specialized magazines) used for different lifestyles. Newspapers represent class, political, religious, ethnic and language groups and magazines represent every sort of special interest. This way it is possible to reach particular and well-defined sections of readers. Nowadays newspapers and magazines have improved printing in order to raise the interest of the readers. A disadvantage of printed ads is the difficult evaluation of their real audience.

The television has as main advantage the millions of simultaneous viewers and the power to capture the attention. It is a powerful and fast promotional support but usually too expensive and it is not aimed for a specific people category. The radio is the most used medium for advertising. It is especially a means of promotion, mainly used for brands notoriety and for increasing sales through the repetition of the advertisements. The cinema is considered, after a crisis period, a prestigious medium, relatively cheap, which allows aiming at a specific target (young and educated people living in a city). The same as the printed ad, it allows the regionalization and the localization of promoting campaigns.
The internet, pictured by Bill Gates (1995:184) as an electronic highway, giving „us all access to seemingly unlimited information, anytime and anyplace we care to use it”, can play an advertising role through its media: television, personal web pages, message boards, podcasts, blogs and video hosting services.

**Advertising language**

Advertisements’ aim is to transmit a message that is easy to understand and memorize. A good ad is memorized through repetition, but the brand name or a good slogan can also make an ad successful. Leech (1983) asserts that by dint of repetition, whether in a single commercial or a whole advertising campaign, the consumer may be brought to the point where the brand name and some catch phrase associated with it are automatically associated one with the other, so that the product is stored in his mind with a permanently attached label.

Ad copywriters try to comprise these characteristics when writing ads, and use language as an important instrument to surprise and to draw the attention of the audience. From its beginning till nowadays, advertising has created its own language. Leech (1983) points out that there are 3 types of “linguistic unorthodoxy”: lexical (blend words, nonce words), semantic (personification, metaphor) and contextual (ambiguity). The language used in advertising is considered different from the language used in everyday situations.

Slogans are a way of advertising products. They concentrate in few words the motto of the company, its aims and the benefits that the products can bring to customers. Slogans become an important part of the advertising strategy when a company chooses to advertise its products in an international market, entering a different social and cultural frame. A written advertisement is composed of the following elements: headline (draws the reader’s attention and for this purpose it has to use the brand name in the headline), body copy (contains the main part of the advertising information), slogan (catch word, catch phrase), illustrations and colors (present the realistic image of the product but also transmit ideas, attitudes or beliefs), trademark (a distinctive sign that distinguishes a product or service from the others; the trademark comprises a typical name, word, phrase, logo, design and image or a combination of these elements), brand name (a collection of symbols which help the product or service to be recognized in the market).

In order to be effective, every slogan has certain characteristics: it uses simple and colloquial language, the sentences must be short, usually imperative or interrogative, or even sentences without a predicate. Slogans rely on the connotative meaning and ambiguity of words, use puns, well-known phrases, idioms or sayings. New invented words, like blend words, nonce words or compounds make the slogan
quickly draw the attention of the audience. As components of an advertising text, slogans use figures of speech, such as: hyperbole, metaphor, repetition or alliteration.

Slogans can represent: an objective description of the product’s image or utility (e.g. Nokia-Connecting people, Ralph Laurent- Eyewear); an urge to use the product (for example: Coca-Cola- Have a Coke and a smile, Pepsi - Have a Pepsi day!), a symbolic image of the product (Palmolive- The touch of nature, Bounty- A taste of paradise). Metaphors not only describe the products but they also transmit attitudes, ideas or concepts.

Usually slogans are made of short imperative sentences (e.g. Apple computers- Think different. American Express- Do more), or sentences without a predicate (e.g. Allianz- The power on your side, American Airlines- Something special in the air). Slogans are also made up of an enumeration of nouns, adjectives, adverbs or verbs (e.g. E-bay- Buy it. Sell it. Love it. Paulaner- Good. Better. Paulaner). There are slogans which play on the sense of balance between similar and dissimilar parts (e.g. Playstation- Live in your world, play in ours; Microsoft- Your potential. Our Passion).

Many slogans contain a comparative of superiority or the superlative (e.g. Sony- Like no other; Duracell batteries. No battery is stronger longer). There are slogans which rely on the public’s cultural knowledge using well-known idioms, sayings and phrases (e.g. Make out, not war!; Help kids be kids!).

Advertising texts use mainly words or images which can have one or more connotative meanings, in order to persuade, to entertain or to make the public react in a certain way. Connotative meanings in slogans depend on the context. For example, the slogan for Guinness Irish beer: Brilliant! has more connotative meanings. The word could refer to the high quality taste of the beer, to the shining wrapping of the bottle or to the fact that the beer gives you a good mood.

Slogans often use figurative language in order to attract the reader’s attention and interest towards a product or service, or to increase the public’s awareness on a social or environmental issue. Figurative language can create ambiguity, which can give several interpretations to a slogan. Vizental (2001) speaks about polysemy and homonymy as “lexical ambiguity” and about “grammatical ambiguity” which is given by syntactic ambiguity.

The Maybelline cosmetics slogan The make up of make up artists uses a pun which may be ambiguous for the readers. The word make up is used with two meanings. One meaning of the word make-up (cosmetics applied especially to the face) is clear in the context, while the first word of the slogan can be read with the other meaning (the makeup of a group or team which is the combination of the people that are in it).

Another example of ambiguity is the slogan for Dr. Pepper fizzy drink Be a pepper, Drink Dr Pepper. The word pepper is used as common noun and as proper noun. It is not clear in the context whether
the word pepper refers to the name of the brand, as it is not written with a capital letter, or if the word is a part of a figure of speech. The strong taste of the red fizzy drink is associated with the taste of a pepper. The ambiguous formulation can have several interpretations; it could be paraphrased as Be one of us, drink Dr. Pepper or Be as spicy as a pepper (figurative meaning).

A non-profit organization launched a campaign against poverty with the slogan We do not need coins, we need change. The words coins and change are synonyms, but the word change has another meaning as well, namely “1. the act, process, or result of altering or modifying” (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 2011). The printed ad of the campaign shows a man with a placard in his hand that is on strike. An interpretation of the slogan could be “We do not need to receive mercy, we need a change”. However, the meaning of the slogan is ambiguous.

In advertising, the humorous side of puns can make advertisements achieve their goal: to entertain the public and thus to gain its confidence. Goddard (1998:21) points out that “by offering an amusing pun, the advertiser provides his audience with the desired entertainment, and thus makes them feel congenital towards the product which he is promoting”. The advertiser aims to draw and to hold the public’s attention, to make the public more receptive, good willing but also to make the slogan easy to memorize.

In the slogan for Dell computers Dude, you’re getting a Dell!, the word Dell (the brand name for Dell computers) is similar to the homophonic sound of the word deal. The word Dude makes the exclamation be more familiar, and it creates a humorous effect. The slogan plays on the rhythmic effect caused by the alliteration of the consonant d. By suggesting a positive and friendly attitude, the ad can draw the readers’ attention and interest to buy a Dell computer.

Copywriters choose to use idioms and proverbs in slogans mainly because most people use them in current day situations, and because they can be easily recognizable by the public. There are also slogans which use the literal meaning of an idiom or proverb, creating a humoristic effect. Slogans can draw attention very quickly, especially when they are paraphrased. The creative use of idioms and proverbs can give them new meanings, making them memorable. These slogans are either directed to a specific social category or to the public in general. Through repetition, slogans enter in everyday speech, creating a more familiar and friendly way of transmitting a message. The frequent use of paraphrased idioms and proverbs can help people associate the product with a specific slogan.

The slogan for Dodge cars, Grab life by the horns, uses the English idiom “to take the bull by the horns”. The meaning of the idiom is “Fig. to confront a problem head-on and deal with it openly” (McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs, 2002) or „to do something difficult in a determined and confident way” (Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2006).
Translation theories. An overview

Translation is defined as a “bilingually mediated communication” (Neubert & Shreve, 1992:69). “The translator is not the sender of the source text message but a text producer in the target culture, who adopts somebody else’s intention in order to produce a communicative instrument for the target culture or a target-culture document of a source culture communication.” (Nord, 1991:13)

One main concern of linguistics has always been the establishment of communication between people belonging to different speech communities. Translators have attempted to overcome barriers in international communication, in a century when the plurality of languages is an integral part of people’s lives. The expansion of science and technology which use specialized terminology has also increased the need for translations in these fields. In the same way, in order to achieve their purpose, advertising agencies have increased the number of translation services.

According to Nida and Reyburn (1981), the main purpose of the translator is to deliver the information both in content and form. The translator’s purpose involves much more than to render information; he might have to render a particular type of behavior by means of a translation. In this case, the translator has to attempt, not only to make the message intelligible, but also render the meaning for the target public. Nida & Taber (1969: 14) discusses the problem of equivalence and speaks about contextual consistency; dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence; the aural (heard) form of language over the written form; forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience for which a translation is intended over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious.

The text linguistic approach used the text as the basic unit of communication. The text as a whole, with its specific function, was considered to be the translation unit. The new approach focused on the target text. The translation process involved the analysis of the source text for communicative purposes, and the target text production. In this way, the text production was based on the analysis of the source text features. The first step was to analyze the smallest textual units and ended with the analysis of the text as a whole. Reiss (2000) classifies the text types according to their function: the depictive function, emphasized in content-focused texts, the expressive function, pointed out in form-focused texts, and the persuasive function emphasizing appeal-focused texts. The source text was compared with similar texts existing in the target culture, in order to duplicate the intended function of the text.

Advertising texts pertain to the third text type. Appeal-focused texts do not only convey certain information, but they render information in a particular perspective for an explicit purpose. This type of text should cause a specific reaction from the audience, engaging it in specific actions, like buying a certain
product or service. According to Reiss (2000:41), in the case of appeal-focused texts, the translator’s main purpose should be to obtain the same response from the public as in the source language.

In advertising texts the translation has to consider the target culture, which has to be analyzed separately from the source culture, as the advertisement suffers a cultural displacement. The Translation-Oriented Source Text Analysis of Christiane Nord (1991) is based on the functionalist approach and explains how the translator must inquire about the translation context elements and their influence in the transfer methods that have to be applied. The translator has to permanently compare the source text elements and the target text elements. She points out that the translator must first perform an elaborated analysis of the intratextual elements (linguistic and structural) of the source text, which have to be adjusted to the extratextual elements of the target text.

The intratextual features make reference to the subject of the text, the information, the structure of the text with its compositional and linguistic elements. The subject matter is important because it determines coherence, feasibility or the cultural context. The cultural context can determine the decision-making process. The macro-structure of the text refers to other forms of in-texts such as: quotations and footnotes which can also give information about the structure of the text. The micro-structure refers to the sentence structure, the distribution of clauses in the text, and the cohesive linking devices.

Extratextual elements include information about the source text producer, the initial purpose of the text, the addressee, the medium of communication. The information about source text producer can be obtained from the text, from, preface, epilogue or footnotes or right from the text. The purpose of the text is determined by the sender’s intention, which is very important because it determines the structure of the target text, both in content and form. Information about the addressee is also essential in case of advertising text. For example, the translator needs to know the target public’s expectations in order to render the same intention as that of the source text producer. The information about the channel helps the translator decide upon the way the information should be presented, the choice of sentence types, or the use of non-verbal elements.

Puns are often difficult to translate because they are related to the specificity of a language. The disambiguation of puns in slogans makes the text become less interesting for the readers, unless the translator tries to reproduce the message of the slogan as close to the original. In some slogans, what matters is the pun itself. In case of puns, there is no specific strategy for translation because of the complexity of the methods used by a pun, which can differ from one language to another, such as homophony, polysemy, or metaphors. Thus, the translator becomes a text writer who attempts to reproduce the originality of the source text in another form which can have the same impact on the readers of the target text.
Case studies

Advertisements carry a cultural message, the ideas, concepts, beliefs of a country. Language is the expression of culture and individuality of its speakers; therefore, the translator must first understand the meaning of the culture-bound elements of the source text and then transpose those elements in the target text. Cultural untranslatability occurs when the elements in the source culture do not have an equivalent in the target culture. The cultural differences between two languages can be translated by adaptation or paraphrase.

Baker (1992:63), for example, states that idioms are “frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components.” She argues that the majority of translators working with a foreign language cannot achieve the same sensitivity of native speakers to know when a certain idiom should be used or not. The main problems when translating idiomatic expressions are: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly and the difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression convey into the target language. An important issue when translating idioms is the case when the idiom in the source language has no equivalent in the target language.

The slogan for Dell computers Dude, you’re getting a Dell! is made up of a pun. The substitution of the word dude in Romanian is difficult because of the absence of a similar word in the target culture which would render the same meaning. A possible equivalent is the noun tip which nevertheless, does not cover the exact meaning of the appellative dude. We can also omit the word dude and turn it into the Romanian appellative hei. Translating the slogan as Tipule, îţi iei un Dell, the slogan becomes less meaningful, losing the alliteration of the letter d.

Another example of linguistic untranslatability is the slogan for Johnnie Walker Whisky, Keep walking. The sentence is linguistically untranslatable in Romanian because a literal translation would change the meaning of the slogan. If we translate the verb to walk with the Romanian verb a merge, the message of the slogan may become ambiguous, as the imperative Keep walking must automatically be associated with the name of the brand Johnnie Walker. However, a possible literal translation of the slogan into Romanian, would be Mergi înainte or Rămâi fidel. Bea Johnnie Walker. Another suitable version would be Mergi înainte cu Johnnie Walker.

As for automakers, many companies have chosen to preserve the English (or native language) version of their slogans even in regional markets. They have created specific advertisements for each country, but decided to keep the brand slogan untranslated. Audi, BMW, Mercedez-Benz, Ford, Toyota and
many other important players of the automotive industry have chosen the most suitable strategy to promote their products.

In Romania, there are few automobile advertisements that promote their cars by using the translated version of the international English slogan, for example, the brands BMW, Toyota or KIA Motors. Others, like FIAT, Ford or Hyundai have preserved the English version of the slogan in the Romanian market, or, like Audi, Opel or Volkswagen, have used the slogan in German language; Citroen’s choice was French language for advertising the brand in entire Europe, while Seat uses the Spanish version as well as a secondary line of slogans, created in Romanian. The choice for the native language could be a sign of respect for tradition and experience, a bold move for breaking the English pattern or a marketing strategy meant to create impact by making a difference. All these techniques lead to the creation of internationally used slogans meant to communicate the automakers’ purposes, as well as their connection to the customers worldwide (e.g. Alfa Romeo uses the slogan “Beauty is not enough”, the German manufacturer uses the slogan “Vorsprung durch Technik” (“Advancement through technology”) in advertising campaigns all over the world, including Romania. The slogan was translated into English for international use as “Keeping ahead through technology”. The Audi website mentions that “English cannot fully capture the meaning of Vorsprung which means to leap ahead.” The BMW company's slogans in English are "The Ultimate Driving Machine" and "Sheer Driving Pleasure". The original German slogan is "Freude am Fahren" (“Joy in Driving”). BMW has translated the slogan for Romanian customers as “Plăcerea de a conduce”, preserving the original meaning of the German advertisement campaign (“Joy in driving”). One of the most attractive BMW statements was also preserved in the Romanian version of their advertisement campaigns: “We don't just build cars, we create emotions”. FIAT’s advertising slogan, “Driven by passion“, was preserved in the English version. Hyundai Motor Company has chosen to advertise in Romania with the official English slogan, “Drive your way”, which creates a positive impact through its rhyme with the brand’s name, making it fun and easy to memorize. The South Korean car builder is also developing a broad range of social programs worldwide, under the slogan “Moving the world together”. KIA Motors, South Korea’s second largest automobile manufacturer, has chosen to adapt their slogan, “The power to surprise” to the local Romanian market with the literal translation, “Puterea de a surprinde”. KIA also added a particularity to the slogan: “Puterea de a (te) surprinde” (the reflexive pronoun “te” inserted between brackets makes the slogan more addressed to the customer.

**Conclusion**

Slogans are a major component of the printed advertisements. They carry the central message of a company advertising its brand. At the same time, slogans transmit a message about the culture and the
customs of a country and hence, the translation of culture-bound elements of the source text can often become problematic. The absence of a similar equivalent of the source text element in the target text requires most of the times adaptation, paraphrase or literal translation (as slogans often make use of the literal meaning of idioms or phrases).

**Bibliography**


**Dictionaries**