



Advertising Translation: the Power of Semiotic Systems to Hide Ideology

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ABSTRACT

In times of globalization where people, goods and discourses continually flow, the translator has to face the new challenges posed by the media and specifically advertising. In highly ideologically charged advertising campaigns, everything –from linguistic elements to colors, clothes, models' gazes, attitudes, and much more– become signs whose ideological meaning should be translated for other cultures. This paper constitutes an attempt of showing that, apart from interlinguistic translation, intersemiotic translation –the one carried out between different systems of signs– is not only present in advertising campaigns, but also constitutes a powerful tool of persuasion and ideology transmission. We will attempt to show how through these two translation techniques messages and discourses can be transmitted surreptitiously, as well as analyzing the power and ethical consequences which derive from these translator's decisions.

KEYWORDS : advertising translation, ideology, power, women

For some decades we have witnessed a globalizing process which compresses time and erases distances (Bauman, 2003/1998) thanks to the recent development of information and communication technologies. The speed of movement reached by people, goods and discourses is practically instantaneous (*ibid.*), which has finally caused an irrevocable hybridization of cultures and identities (Álvarez & Vidal, 1996). However, the aforementioned phenomenon does not have the same impact in the whole world's population, since we know that some cultures dominate and some others are subjugated, that the predominant discourses are the Western ones (Vidal, 2010) and that homogenization is produced with an Anglo-Saxon bias.

Immersed in this complex transnational network, the translators' relevance is increasing nowadays. Since it is through them that messages can overcome linguistic and cultural boundaries, they unavoidable become a key element for the media to spread certain discourses and narratives (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009). In this sense, and considering the current consumer society, advertising constitutes a really powerful weapon of persuasion which is broadly used by multinational companies. They invest large amounts of money in global advertising campaigns which are expected to work in every country where they are present, although some cultural differences will ineluctably arise (Munday, 2004). However, in some cases, campaigns require a major adaptation in order to be accepted in the target culture, since identical signs may transmit different ideologies. With a source text¹ in which every element is carefully chosen and considering that the use of the signs is never innocent (Vidal, 2012), translators presence how the limits of the traditional definition of the field are expanding², as well as seeing themselves immersed in complicated identity-negotiation processes (Vidal, 2010), which are in fact the key in which relies the success or failing of a campaign in a different linguistic and cultural context.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Considering the urgent research of going into depth in the advertising translation subfield, we firstly aim to contribute to remedy this scarcity through the present paper, which does not only cover some techniques used in this field, but also incorporates an ethical dimension of translation decisions. Our hypothesis is that, in these days of globalization and consumption, where goods and discourses flow in a certain direction, no country or group is isolated (Beck, 2008/1997, p. 33), as well as the fact that we cannot either escape the cosmopolitanism flow surrounding us (Appiah, 2006). Indeed, on a daily basis, we experience what Beck (2005/2004) calls "banal cosmopolitanism", which Appiah also studies:

There are some Western products and vendors that appeal to people in the rest of the world because they're seen as Western, as modern: McDonald's, Levis. [...] People wear Levis in every continent. In some places they are informal wear; in others they're dressy. You can get Coca-Cola on every continent, too. In Kumasi you will get it at funerals.

[...] The point is that people on each place make their own uses even of the most famous global commodities (Appiah, 2006, p. 113).

In the chosen advertising campaign, we will analyze linguistic and non-linguistic elements and the implicit ideology which they hide. We will show how the exercise of power can be performed through signs of very different nature, which are part of complex semiotic systems where public and personal narratives (Baker, 2006) are incorporated in order to create needs and consumption habits. In fact, Joanna Pawelczyk, argues that the advertising discourse "is not only representational (socially constituted), but also socially constitutive" (2008, p. 314). In the present study, the methodology used is of an interdisciplinary nature, which combines perspectives from Descriptive Studies of Translation, providing us with concepts such as "narrative", "power", and "ideology"; from Sociology we borrow the notion of "cosmopolitanism", and finally, Barthes's semiotics are particularly useful, specially the concepts of "first and second-order significations". Equally important are the three types of translation distinguished by Jakobson³: intralingual, interlingual (what we call the "traditional definition" of translation), and intersemiotic translation.

TRANSLATION AND ADVERTISING: PRELIMINARY REMARKS

As a preliminary step to the analysis of the employed strategies in the chosen campaign, it is necessary to bear in mind some considerations about the use of the signs in the advertising sphere. Adverts transmit ideology surreptitiously thanks to the elaboration of complex semiotic systems in which every sign (colors, shapes, models, etc.) play a determined role (Munday, 2004; Vidal, 2012). Publicists never make an arbitrary or innocent use of them, so their translation contributes to perpetuate certain discourses and involves ethical consequences. In this regard, we agree with Baker that no translator or interpreter "can escape responsibility for the narratives they elaborate and promote through their translation and interpreting work" (2006, p. 26). The difficulty of translating these elements into a different culture relies in the fact that identical signs can evoke different second-order significations, in Barthes's sense of the term. Thus, not only the translator should be fully aware of the discourses hidden in the source semiotic system, but he would also need to anticipate to the acceptability level of the target culture (Munday, 2004).

CASE STUDY: ANAÏS ANAÏS, PREMIER DÉLICE BY CACHAREL

The chosen campaign is *Anaïs Anaïs, Premier Délice*⁴ by the fashion company Cacharel. The perfume was launched in 2014, targeted to new generations as a complete reinvention of the classical *Anaïs Anaïs*. In the image we can see three young adolescents with very pale skin and light make-up, which symbolizes youth and reflects the target audience of the campaign. This light-colored make-up constitutes an intersemiotic translation of the pastel colors which appear in the bottle of perfume. The girls wear crowns of flowers on their hair, which are indeed one of the key elements in the semiotic system:

flowers can re-present here beauty and gentleness, but also ephemeral youth and, more directly, nature and spring, elements which clearly refer to the sweet smell of the perfume itself.

Regarding the linguistic elements, what we find first is the name of the perfume: *Anaïs Anaïs*, which is a reference to the audience who are familiar with previous versions of this perfume. Under that text we read “Mon premier délice”, in French –with no English translation also used as a sign–, which is the slogan given for this new version of the perfume. Two words are essential here to read the true narrative lying in the campaign: first “délice”, which can be translated into English as “delight”, but also “pleasure”. It clearly reveals the interplay between gastronomic pleasure and the sexual one. This term appears with “premier”, which can mean “first”, but also “initial”, referring in this case to the first experiences in the sexual sphere. Under it, there is a hashtag –used in social networks to tag posts about the same topic: “#Girltribu”. We can see now why the girls’ make-up is “tribal”, the one used preparing for wars; it constitutes an intersemiotic translation of the term “tribu”. In the bottom part of the picture we find the fashion company name, “Cacharel”, decorated with flowers, one more intersemiotic translation of the youth, beauty, spring and the smell of the perfume.

It is particularly curious the Spanish translation of this advert. In Spain, the advert was in fact very similar; the only translated element was the perfume slogan: “El perfume de mis inicios”. In this version, “perfume” is added and “délice” is removed, but they kept “inicios”. The last word retakes the echoes from the French “premier”, but only the sexual ones. It is indeed much more explicit in that sense. It should be noted here how relevant can be the removal of just one element: “délice”. Only by lexical selection, adding or removing a few words, advertisers and fashion companies know exactly how to manipulate and create new messages.

CONCLUSIONS

We have argued in the first part of this paper that in this globalization era the predominant discourses were the Western ones and that homogenization was produced with an Anglo-Saxon bias. Even among Western countries translation may be complex and necessary, although in much cases adverts are not translated as a translation technique. However, the message is much more explicit in the target version. On which reasons does this decision rely? Why the message is clearly sexual in the Spanish adaptation?

Regarding the ethical dimension, we also suggested that translators should be fully aware of the fact that their decisions always involve consequences. In a world where nothing is innocent or arbitrary, the translator should consider if the narratives and discourses he helps perpetuating are acceptable in the target culture or if he even accepts to disseminate a certain ideology. It is important to bear in mind that the true narrative which lies in this campaign is one encouraging three minors to start sexual life: to which extent is it ethical to spread this discourse? These aspects should be considered in advertising translation, as well as the urgent need to research on intersemiotic translation, the key element which links the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the semiotic systems.

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