



Rhetorical Transplantation and Cultural Transcoding in Advertising Text Translation—A Study of Creative Translation Strategies Based on Chinese and English Brand Advertisements

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Abstract

Advertising translation serves as a critical bond in cross-cultural brand communication. Its core mission lies not merely in literal conversion between the source and target languages, but also in achieving accurate information transmission, effective emotional resonance, and value adaptation while taking into account both commercial purposes and cross-cultural acceptance habits. Against the background of increasingly fierce global brand competition, differences in language, customs, values, and aesthetic preferences frequently lead to practical challenges in advertising translation, such as conflicts of cultural symbols, mismatched imagery, and the untranslatability of certain content. Taking Chinese and English bilingual brand advertisements as the research carrier, this paper adopts a comparative approach to systematically analyze the differences between the two types of advertisements in syntactic structure, rhetorical features, linguistic styles, and expressive logic. It focuses on the adaptation dilemmas of culture-specific items, folk symbols, and value metaphors in the translation process, and further demonstrates the practical value and feasibility of creative translation strategies in breaking down cultural barriers and balancing commercial demands with aesthetic acceptance. The findings indicate that creative translation is not a simple search for semantic equivalence. Instead, through semantic reconstruction, image replacement, cultural context re-creation, and rhetorical function transplantation, it flexibly adjusts textual forms and cultural connotations. This approach significantly reduces cultural misinterpretation and communication loss in cross-cultural transmission, strengthens the appeal and persuasiveness of advertisements, and ultimately improves the communication efficiency and market acceptance of brand advertisements in target markets.

Keywords

Advertising translation; creative translation strategy; rhetorical transplantation; cultural transcoding; cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

As a complex of commerce and culture, advertising possesses a distinctive linguistic style and cultural characteristics. Its translation is not merely a conversion of linguistic signs, but also a cross-cultural reconstruction of values, aesthetic tastes, and behavioral patterns. In advertising translation, despite many similarities in the application of Chinese

and English advertisements, significant cultural differences between China and the West result in distinctively different linguistic frameworks between Chinese and English. Traditional translation theories emphasize “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance”, yet in the context of globalization, advertising translation needs to break through the limitations of “literal faithfulness” and achieve “functional equivalence” through rhetorical transplantation and cultural transcoding (Erdelić, 2025).

As a translation paradigm that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries, creative translation is essentially aimed at transforming semantic gaps, rhetorical conflicts, or value barriers in the source text caused by cultural differences into communicative effects perceivable by target-language audiences through semantic reconstruction and cultural context re-creation. The creativity of this strategy is reflected not only in the flexible transformation of linguistic styles—such as converting Chinese four-character structures into English alliteration or imagery reorganization—but also in its deep-level operation of cultural adaptation: by decoding the semiotic system of the source culture and reconstructing the cognitive framework of the target culture, advertising texts retain their commercial persuasiveness while achieving cross-cultural resonance. In persuasive texts such as commercial advertisements and public relations copy, creative translation enhances communication power through dual “functional-emotional” adaptation; in communicative texts such as brand slogans and social media content, it lowers the cognitive threshold and strengthens audience participation and identification via cultural transcoding. With its dual characteristics of linguistic innovation and cultural sensitivity, creative translation has become a crucial practical approach to cross-cultural communication in the globalized context.

Taking Chinese and English brand advertisements as examples, this study integrates creative translation theories to conduct an in-depth analysis of rhetorical transplantation and cultural transcoding in advertising texts, exploring ways to realize cultural adaptation while preserving commercial appeals, so as to provide theoretical references for global advertising practices.

2. A Comparison of Linguistic Styles Between Chinese and English Advertisements

2.1 Differences in Rhetorical Devices

2.1.1 Rhetorical Features of Chinese Four-Character Phrases and Parallelism

Generally speaking, Chinese advertising texts frequently employ four-character phrases and parallelism, with refined diction and euphonious rhythm. With a unique sense of cadence and prosody, they can quickly attract public attention. In contrast, most English advertising copy pursues conciseness, forcefulness, and directness, with straightforward and accessible language full of modernity and fashion. The most striking difference from Chinese advertisements is that English ads do not deliberately pursue formal parallel structures like four-character patterns.

Four-character phrases and parallelism fully demonstrate the unique charm of the Chinese language. Therefore, when advertisers or translators promote products to consumers, they should highlight this feature. Through ingenious creative transformation and precise linguistic expression, the younger generation can feel as if they are enjoying a rhythmic linguistic feast when exposed to advertisements. They can truly perceive the phonetic beauty of Chinese four-character structures and the formal beauty of neat symmetry, further appreciating the unique charm of the Chinese language and culture. This arouses their recognition and affection for the product, and strengthens memory points through harmonious phonology and symmetrical semantics.

(1) Make Every Drop Count. (Dettol)
 点滴不漏，杀菌到位。

This is an advertisement for Dettol disinfectant. The phrase “点滴不漏” not only echoes the core word “drop”, but also vividly conveys that the disinfectant provides full coverage without missing any corner. “杀菌到位” directly points out the product efficacy, conforming to the expressive habit of Chinese advertisements featuring conciseness and highlighting selling points, making it more appealing to consumers.

2.1.2 Rhetorical Features of English Alliteration and Pun

English advertisements show a preference for alliteration and pun, evoking associations through phonetic wordplay and semantic ambiguity. Alliteration creates a distinctive phonetic rhythm and cadence by repeating identical or similar initial consonants, much like a beautiful melody, which quickly captures consumers’ attention and makes the slogan catchy and memorable. Pun, by contrast, exploits polysemy or homophony to endow a word or sentence with

two or more meanings in a specific context, stimulating rich imagination among consumers. In appreciating the slogan, they perceive the wit and fun of language, thus developing a stronger interest in the advertised product or service.

Through these two rhetorical devices, English advertisements skillfully use phonetic games and semantic ambiguity to create an atmosphere of fun and imagination for consumers, greatly enhancing the appeal and communication effect of advertisements (Arcos, 2024).

(2) We lead, others copy. (Ricoh)
我们领先，他人仿效。

This is the brand slogan of Ricoh copiers. Although the initial letters “l” of “lead” and “c” of “copy” are different, phonetically, “lead” starts with /l/ and “copy” with /k/. In line with the common logic of English alliteration, the slogan focuses on creating phonetic rhythm. It emphasizes Ricoh’s leading position in the copier industry and demonstrates its advantages in innovation and technology (Yan, 2023).

2.1.3 Strategies of Rhetorical Transplantation

Chinese alliteration and vowel repetition possess distinctive charm, with a circular rhythmic beauty that not only strengthens linguistic prosody but also produces excellent promotional effects. In the translation of English advertising texts, we can skillfully adopt such phonetic devices combined with cultural analogy to represent the unique rhythm of English alliteration and end rhyme, achieving cultural adaptation by preserving brand pronunciation and reconstructing semantics.

(3) Have a Break, Have a Kit-Kat. (Kit-Kat)
轻松一刻，奇巧时刻。

In Example 3, the letter “c” and the syllable “co-” in Coca-Cola form cross alliteration. Its Chinese translation 可口可乐 (Kekou Kele) is highly ingenious: it skillfully employs the initial consonant “k” to form the alliterative phrase 可口 (kekou), and further connects it with the following character 可 (ke), effectively retaining the alliteration of the original slogan. The translation sounds sonorous, easy to pronounce, and simple to remember. Similarly, in Example 4, the brand name Kit-Kat is translated as 奇巧 (Qiqiao), converting English alliteration into Chinese alliteration. This translation is extremely clever and adopts a Chinese four-character structure to enhance rhythmic sense. It preserves the brand pronunciation while reconstructing semantics, thus achieving cultural adaptation (Bu, 2009).

2.2 Value Conflicts: Collectivist Imagery vs. Individualist Values

Value conflicts constitute the most concealed and persistent challenge in advertising text translation, requiring translators to go beyond the linguistic level and delve into the underlying logic of cultural semiotic systems. Through strategies such as functional equivalence, cultural translation, and dynamic adaptation, translators can achieve a “soft landing” of cross-cultural values while retaining advertising creativity.

2.2.1 Collectivist Expressions in Chinese Advertisements

Although collectivism has varied in form and expression across different historical periods, its core connotation has remained consistent. Dating back to ancient China, the orthodox feudal ideology upheld by Confucius, centered on “great unification,” fully embodied the essence of collectivism. Chinese advertisements often take family and social groups as core images, conveying the value of prioritizing collective interests.

(4) 温暖亲情，金龙鱼的大家庭。(Arawana)
Warmth in Family, Golden Dragon in Unity.

The slogan of the Chinese brand Arawana, “Warmth in Family, Golden Dragon in Unity,” captures its core philosophy. Fresh and natural, it integrates traditional Chinese thought and culture, easily resonating with audiences at all levels and in all fields. In China, where family values are highly emphasized, everyone carries an emotional bond connecting them to their family. A literal English translation might weaken emotional resonance due to the absence of collectivist values; the end rhyme of “Family” and “Unity” is therefore used to preserve collectivist imagery.

For instance, the concept of “big family” in the Arawana advertisement echoes the traditional Chinese cultural notion of “family-state isomorphism.”

2.2.2 Individualist Expressions in Western Advertisements

Individualism is the ideological essence of Western culture, with origins tracing back to classical philosophy and the politics of ancient Greek city-states. The Renaissance and the Reformation played crucial and decisive roles in the final establishment of Western individualist values. During the Renaissance, people “discovered” the greatness of humanity itself, affirmed human value and creativity, and advocated liberation from constraints to allow free development of individuality, thus establishing individualist values at the ideological and cultural level. Western advertisements emphasize individuality—for example, Apple’s “Think Different” promotes independent thinking. In translation, the value orientation of slogans needs adjustment:

(5) Just Do It. (Nike)

放手去做。

Nike’s slogan “Just Do It” conveys the Western value of self-transcendence. However, a literal Chinese translation might reduce appeal due to insufficient collective resonance. Localized adaptations such as “Just Go for It” are adopted to activate the collective cultural identity of an “action-oriented” spirit.

2.2.3 Creative Translation Practices in Value Transcoding

When Chinese advertisements carry collectivist values, translation should weaken group orientation and strengthen individual connection. For Western advertisements marked by individualism, translation needs to supplement social context and render Western ideals of individual freedom into more culturally appropriate expressions.

(6) It makes you feel like the man you are. (Buick)

心静思远，志行千里。

Buick’s slogan, “It makes you feel like the man you are,” could be misinterpreted as conveying “male chauvinism” if translated literally into Chinese. It is therefore adjusted to “Calm Mind, Far Vision; Aspiration Drives Miles,” reconstructing semantics around collectivist values to avoid cultural resistance caused by excessive emphasis on individualism.

3. Untranslatability Challenges of Cultural Symbols

The Chinese dragon stands for authority and auspice, whereas the Western “dragon” represents evil. A literal translation of the Chinese phrase “Loong Soars” as “Dragon Soar” may lead to cultural misunderstanding. Creative translation can adopt transliteration with annotation, such as “Loong Soar”, to avoid cultural conflicts (Kronfeld, 2023).

(7) 衣食住行，有龙则灵。 (China Construction Bank).

Loong Card makes daily necessities a piece of cake.

This slogan reflects China Construction Bank’s (CCB) commitment to long-term protection of customers’ assets in the financial sector. The English word “loong” not only matches the sound of the Chinese “long (dragon)”, but also accurately conveys the brand’s profound vision: “CCB accompanies your enduring wealth” (Xu, 2021).

Cultural symbols in advertisements are closely tied to specific cultural backgrounds. Without relevant cultural knowledge, target audiences can hardly understand such symbols. In advertising translation, literal translation often fails to preserve the original meaning and effect, making creative translation a more common approach.

4. Feasibility Demonstration of Creative Translation Strategies

4.1 The Concept of Creative Translation

In the field of advertising translation, creative translation has always been the shared soul of the source text and its target version. To achieve faithful reproduction or mechanical equivalence identical to the original text is unrealistic and cannot fulfill the core purpose of advertising translation. Currently, there are three representative views on the definition of creative translation in academic circles:

First, creative translation is essentially a re-creation of the original text, focusing on “creation” rather than “translation”. It aims to break the “untranslatability” caused by linguistic and cultural differences by innovatively rewriting the source text in the target language, or even completely reconstructing it when necessary. This view conforms to

public understanding and is widely accepted in translation studies (Zhang, 2022).

Second, creative translation is equated with “initial translation” or “first translation”. Scholar Yang Quanhong has questioned and criticized this traditional interpretation, arguing that “creative translation” has nothing to do with modern “creativity”, but rather refers to the initial act of “starting translation” or “embarking on translation”.

Third, creative translation is defined as “creative translation”, emphasizing that translation remains its essential nature, with “translation” at its core. From this perspective, creative translation is inherently related to conventional translation, distinguished by reproducing the original meaning and aesthetic qualities through innovative methods.

In English advertising translation, translators must go beyond literal meaning and achieve attractiveness and appeal through semantic extension and expansion. Culture is highly complex, with each ethnic culture possessing a unique history, development, and creativity. Equivalent words may be absent in the target language during translation. This process must balance cultural adaptation, emotional resonance, and commercial appeal, retaining core product values while conforming to target linguistic and cultural norms. In short, creative translation realizes semantic adaptation through “deconstruction-reconstruction”.

4.2 “Deconstruction-Reconstruction” in Creative Translation

Creative translation of advertisements is far more than simple word conversion; it is a highly challenging and creative task. Translators must first thoroughly understand the advertised product, including its functions, advantages, unique selling points, and target audience, as these form the core of advertising content. Meanwhile, the linguistic style of the original advertisement—whether humorous or elegant—must be accurately grasped for proper continuation in translation.

Translators also need a deep understanding of the cultural context and brand image. Consumer values, aesthetics, and consumption psychology vary across cultures, and brands form specific perceptions and positioning through long-term operation. These factors must be considered to ensure the translated advertisement aligns with target cultural acceptance and accurately conveys the brand image.

Based on sufficient preliminary information, translators should creatively restructure the advertising language by integrating the linguistic features. Respecting the original intention, they use target-language expressions and rhetorical devices to endow the advertisement with a unique charm in the new linguistic and cultural environment, thus achieving better promotional effects.

(8) Real Beauty Sketches. (Dove)

真美，由你定义。

Dove’s cosmetic advertisement uses an experiment to compare the differences between “how others see you” and “how you see yourself”. A literal translation would be “Sketches of True Beauty”. The concept reveals women’s excessive self-criticism of appearance, advocates breaking social aesthetic prejudice, and embracing one’s true image.

In the translation “True Beauty is Defined by You”, “Sketches” is deconstructed to highlight helping consumers express and define their own beauty, granting them aesthetic sovereignty. This version fits the Chinese market’s emphasis on individual value. Emphasizing “you” also shortens the distance between the brand and the audience, strengthens participation and appeal, and successfully transforms the Western brand concept into emotional resonance in the Chinese market.

(9) Sense and Simplicity. (Philips)

精于心简于形。

A literal translation of Philips’ slogan would be “Sense and Simplicity”, which is accurate but lacks appeal. Through creative extension, “Sophisticated at Heart” corresponds to “sense”, going beyond the single meaning of “rationality” to emphasize the brand’s innovative, precise, and human-centered technological design. “Simple in Form” corresponds to “simplicity”, transcending physical simplicity to convey user-friendly operation and elegant design.

The creatively translated slogan elevates product features to brand values, implying Philips “polishes technology with craftsmanship and serves life with minimalist design”, meeting consumers’ dual demands for quality and aesthetics (Chen, 2018).

5. Conclusion

Rhetorical transplantation and cultural transcoding in advertising text translation should center on creative translation strategies, realizing cultural adaptation through semantic “deconstruction-reconstruction”. Differences in linguistic styles and value conflicts between Chinese and English advertisements require translators to break away from the limitation of “literal faithfulness” and reduce misunderstanding risks through cultural symbol translation and recontextualization.

The essence of creative translation is “dancing in chains”: creating maximum communication value within linguistic constraints. The continuous renewal and expansion of translation concepts and strategies—the evolution from literal translation and free translation to creative translation—results from the integrated development of translation studies, cross-cultural communication, and other disciplines. In turn, it promotes translation practice and meets social and market demands.

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