

A Study on English-Chinese Translation of Brand Names from the Perspective of Memetics-Taking Perfume Brand Names as an Example

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Abstract: With the development of world trade, the exchanges of domestic and foreign commodities are becoming frequent. To make customers know more products and promote sales, the translation of brand names is inevitable. Brand names can be accepted by consumers only after accurate and appropriate translations, so as to achieve the purpose of promoting products and establishing images. This essay takes the memetic theory as a guide, and analyses the translation of perfume brand names from the perspective of pragmatic equivalence. By using equivalent substitution strategy and homophonic allusion strategy to analyze the practical examples of E-C translation of perfume brand names, and then summary the feasibility and usability of E-C translation of brand names under the theory of memetics.

1. Introduction

With the development of the economic globalization, both the enterprises and managers pay more attention to the naming and translation of the brand names. As the symbol of an enterprise's products and a representative of an enterprise's image, on one hand, a brand name plays a key role in the selling of the products, which is its commercial characteristic; on the other hand, it acts as the cultural carrier of an enterprise, carrying rich cultural information, which is its cultural characteristic. Therefore, the translation of brand names is of vital importance and has caught more and more people's attention. We need to find an appropriate theory to instruct its translation to make its two characteristics get the utmost display. The application of the theory of memetics to brand name translation is rather a new trial and offers much room for exploration. Under the framework of memetics, every brand name will be regarded as a meme and the transmission of memes from the source culture to the target one will be explicated in detail with the aid of the memetic graph of brand name translation. To illustrate the viewpoint, a number of perfume brand names and the corresponding translations will be cited. On the basis of the theoretic analysis and specific illustration, some principles and strategies of perfume brand name translation should be proposed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Definition and Development of Meme

“Meme” was originally described by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* [1]. Memes are a new concept, not a new one. In general, memes cover a lot, and they can be ideas, famous sayings, fashions, and methods of building houses and so on. Basically, the term “meme” occupies two meanings: a unit of cultural evolution and a unit of imitation. Scholars have given a multitude of definitions ranging from the very wide to the very narrow. Dawkins defined it as “a unit of intellectual or cultural information that survives long enough to be recognized and which can pass from mind to mind” [1]. Later, Dawkins (1982) described that “a meme should be regarded as a unit of information residing in a brain”, which implies that memes must be stored in the mind, hence, fashions conveyed by clothes or action cannot be treated as memes [2]. Dennett (1990) takes memes as information undergoing the evolution algorithm, whether they are in a brain, in a book or in some other physical objects [3]. In 1997, Chesterman introduced memetic theory into the field of translation. His book *Memes of Translation---The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory* identifies the translation's own concepts and perspectives as well as the translation memes, such as translation standards, norms, strategies, and translation values [4]. He Ziran (2003) firstly introduced the memetic theory to China in 2003 [5].

2.2 The Meme Characteristic of the Brand Name

2.2.1 The Selectivity of Imitation

Imitation is the most basic characteristic of trademark memes, and it is also a prerequisite for the formation of trademark memes. To be a meme, a trademark needs someone to imitate it first. Because any memes need to be transmitted through imitation. However, the imitation of trademark memes is selective. In our language communication, some memes can be imitated, duplicated, and propagated constantly by people. This is called a strong meme. However, some language memes have often been overlooked by people, they have not been disseminated, and they have gradually or quickly disappeared. This is known as the weaker memes. In the market, the brand name that can be used and spread must be a strong meme. For example, many perfume names are directly translated into names. Dior and Chanel have a large consumer market in China. These translations show the characteristics of short, easy-to-remember and easy-to-transmit memes, so they are easily accepted, remembered and disseminated by the Chinese. From the view of memetics, these trademarks have become the strong motives of being widely copied and disseminated, which is determined by the selectivity of imitation.

2.2.2 The Periodicity of Replication

Replicability is an essential feature of linguistic memes, and the fundamental reason why trademark memes can be imitated and transmitted is self-replicating. Trademark memes can be copied indefinitely in personal communication and in the market and copied to form new trademark memes. Heylighten proposed that the meme must be successfully copied through four stages: assimilation, retention, expression, and transmission. These four stages continuously reciprocate to form a complete circle of replication. The most suitable meme variant will win and get wider spread. For example, after Anna Sui produced a perfume called Secret Wish which was popular in China, he proved that his trademark name had gone through four stages and eventually became a strong trademark and was widely disseminated to allow more people to understand it. Afterwards, the brand continued to imitate the meme of this perfume name, creating two perfumes called Fairy Dance and Lucky wish. They also received good feedback from customers.

2.2.3 The Uniqueness of Reconstruction

Brand names are the words, names, and designs used by merchants to distinguish their products from other competing products. The attribute of the product name determines that it is impossible to display the characteristics of the product with a longer space like the advertising language. The trade name is generally short and has no more than 4 characters. Therefore, how to use a limited number of words to create a brand name that is easy to impress consumers is a problem that businessmen need to consider. In addition to the selectivity of imitation and the periodicity of replication, a popular brand name is certainly unique, which requires its re-creation in the translation process. In order to make their trademark memes unconventional, merchants give consumers a sense of freshness and novelty, so as to attract consumers' attention. Merchants will tend to choose homophonic words or euphony to replace some phrases to create novelties and so as to give consumers a deep first impression. For example, Lancome and Guerlain adopt homophonic strategy to infect the Chinese host. The translation of these two brand names was short and easy to remember like memes. In the process of reproduction, 'lan' and 'lain' are respectively transliterated the Chinese word "lan", highlighting the uniqueness of its trademark name. Because the word "lan" has a special meaning in China, it metaphorizes a particular temperament of women. So when the Chinese see the brand name, they will leave a deep first impression on them and this may, to a large extent, spur their desire to buy the product, which exactly is their purpose.

3. Strategies of Perfume Brand Name Translation Based on Meme

3.1 Equivalent Substitution Strategy

Given the linguistic differences as well as the cultural gap between Chinese and English, the literal translation or transliteration usually cannot bridge the discrepancy. It is also true for the brand name translation. Therefore, in such circumstances when literal translation or transliteration hinders the receptor from decoding the brand name meme and leads to the mutation of the meme core, it is essential to search in the target language for other proper linguistic elements so as to substitute them for the original expressions to achieve an equivalent pragmatic effect. As a result, the reconstructed meme coat can be combined with the replicated meme core to produce a new brand name meme which serves the same or similar pragmatic function as the original brand name meme.

Example 1: Sui Love

Anna Sui's perfume "Sui Love" is translated in Chinese as "Die zhilian" and it has a good sale in Chinese market. Sui is the surname of Anna Sui, the founder of his Chinese origin. The translator translates it into "su" when translating at the beginning. It discourages the brand name meme to attach itself to the receptor' mind in the target culture, infect him and turn him into a meme host, let alone to be decoded and have the correct meme core retrieved. Therefore, the translator should adopt the equivalent substitution strategy and reconstruct the meme coat as "butterfly". As Chinese are quite familiar with the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, which was hailed as the eternal love of love, and countless people from ancient times have lamented their stories. "Sui Love" perfume is just like that little butterfly, carrying the promise of love and the romantic dream of women through ancient and modern, everlasting. Consequently, the new brand name meme formed by the replicated meme core and the reconstructed meme coat can effectively popularize the features of the product and boost its sales.

Example 2: Shalimar

Guerlain's perfume "Shalimar" is translated in Chinese as "The Thousand and One Nights", which also adopt equivalent substitution strategy. Shalimar is the first oriental perfume in history and it means "home of love" in Sanskrit. There is an ancient Indian love story behind its birth. The

story tells that an Indian king who only loved a woman, his wife, for a lifetime and built a series of gardens. He also planted flowers from all over the world in the garden. He named the garden Shalimar. Later, after her wife's hard labor died, in honor of her wife, creating the perfume was named Shalimar in order to celebrate their love, which is the main meme core of this brand name in the source language. If the translator just translated the brand name from literal meaning, the domestic customer will fail to decode its meme core. Therefore, the translator reproduced another meme coat which is similar to the original brand name coat in order to reduce cultural differences." The Thousand and One Nights" is another love story in China. It tells the story of a little girl who tells stories to the King every night to survive, and finally loves each other. Therefore, by replacing the original memes with "The Thousand and One Nights", it is possible to reproduce the meme core that the original brand name wants to express. At the same time, it can also enable domestic customers to quickly understand the brand name meme core, thereby arousing customers' desire to purchase.

3.2 Homophonic Allusion Strategy

Homophonic allusion strategy means that a brand name is translated with the proper linguistic elements of the target language, bearing more or less acoustic resemblance to the original brand name and complying with the linguistic as well as the cultural practice of the target language.

3.2.1 Homophonic Translation with Altered Meaning

The homophonic translation with altered meaning refers to the case that the original brand name bears some meaning which is however partly or entirely changed after homophonic translation.

Example 1: Idylle

The perfume brand "Idylle (aiduo)" enjoys a good reputation in the domestic market and which can fully illustrate this translation strategy. France Guerlain perfume behind each bottle has a moving love story, Idylle is no exception. Behind Idylle, there is a love story full of mystery and expectation. This perfume can wake up the forgotten scene and moment from the deep memory and it can turn your loved one into your eyes. In order to perfectly demonstrate its implication, the designer designed a gold-plated curve for the bottle of this perfume. The bottle line approximates the feminine curve, and it is also like a drop of golden water, full of elegance and sensuality. Therefore, it is easy for French people to infect the brand name meme coat and correctly decode the interior meme core. When translating it into Chinese, the author skillfully replaces pinyin /ai/ for /I/ thanks to their phonetic similarities, and the letter "d" is then changed into "duo(whose pinyin includes the consonant /d/. All these alteration retain the phonetic characteristics of the original brand name, and the translated brand name is very close to its English counterpart. On the other hand, the word "ai" is a polysemous word in Chinese. It includes love, maternal love, paternal love, friendship, affection, fraternity and the fundamental feelings of all things people have. Besides, when Chinese people see the word "朵", they think of many beautiful and fragrant flowers. This can not only convey the literal meaning of the original brand name accurately, but also to some extent, it is a little different. As soon as they come across this brand name meme, Chinese consumers are bound to be infected and immediately figure out the meme core as being rich in aroma and mellow in taste. Such a precise perception of "Idylle", the brand name meme coat, is grounded on the familiarity with the Chinese cultural background. Moreover, translating the name of this perfume into "aiduo" is in line with the pronunciation of Chinese language. It is crisp and melodious, and has no indecent homophonic sound.

3.2.2 Homophonic Translation with Rendered Meaning

The homophonic translation with rendered meaning is another channel for the brand name meme to be effectively transmitted into the target culture. With respect to its condition of application, the homophonic translation with rendered meaning is usually adopted when the original brand name, or rather, the brand name meme coat bears no meaning whereas the reconstructed meme coat is given some sense after homophonic translation. In such situations, the original brand names often present themselves as proper names or abbreviations of some terms which only exist as particular signs.

Example 1: Chanel

Chanel, the brand name of French perfume is a point in case. The English brand name comes directly from the brand's founder's name. Using this person's name as a brand name is to make consumers feel Chanel's own design concept during use, which is also a heritage of the brand. Because of the local cultural background, local people are certainly familiar with the brand name and the corresponding perfume product, and it is also very clear that the brand name contains the meme core, but for Chinese such an abbreviation indicates nothing at all. Later, the translator chose to take the brand name apart as three words in Chinese respectively, regarded them as Chinese consonants in pinyin /x/ /n/ and /er/, and finally extended them to three syllables as “xiang”, “nai” and “er”. The word “香” reveals the beauty of all women. The word “奈儿” shows a sense of elegance and sophistication. It is appealing to female consumers and enables the spread of exotic culture memes. Once these three words are combined, they can fully demonstrate the characteristics of women. Therefore, this reconstructed meme coat is fully in line with Chinese expressions and therefore can enter the minds of customers in the first place; The new rendered meaning contained in the new brand name meme core can also be timely extracted by customers; The core idea conveyed by the new brand name meme coat is exactly what the original merchant wanted to convey to the public, which favors the replication of the original meme core.

4. Conclusion

In recent years, inspired by the study of the combination of memetics and translation, the author tends to study this field in more depth and focuses on the perspective of trademark translation. The brand name translation can be regarded as the same as the inter-linguistic and intercultural transmission of the brand name meme. In the process, the original brand name is even first assimilated and decoded by the reader in the source culture, who takes the same brand name to separate into meme coat and meme core. The meme core, as the most basic part of brand meme transmission, should be directly copied and preserved as complete as possible. The meme coat should be reconstructed due to the linguistic and cultural differences between the two societies. The reconstructed meme coat is then assembled with the copied meme core to form a new brand meme, thereby infecting the reader in the target culture. If the target reader can decode the memes and select the meme core as the original one, it means that the memetic genetic material is transmitted with high fidelity, thus ensuring the pragmatic equivalence between the translated brand name and the original one. Two translating strategies are proposed, namely, the equivalent substitution strategy and the homophonic allusion strategy. The latter is further subcategorized into two methods as the homophonic translation with altered meaning and the homophonic translation with rendered meaning.

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