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## Translation Strategies from Target Culture Perspective: An Analysis of English and Chinese Brands Names

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### ABSTRACT

As a crucial communication material, the brand name exhibits its growing importance in the worldwide communication. It is a special text with a strong function and a clear persuasive purpose. This paper aims to explore the translation strategy and methods of English brand names from the perspective of culture. According to Skopostheorie, the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose of the overall translational action. The translation methods should be based on the text's function and the target culture. This paper is a tentative study of the guiding strategy and possible methods used in English brand names translation by analyzing the Chinese and English brand names, and how they fulfill the function of promoting products and enhancing the cultural exchange in the hope of offering a new perspective in the brand name translation practice. The study used the Skopostheorie as the guiding theory and strategy to analyze English brand names, which were selected from the brand names database "brandirectory". It is found that the translation should follow the target-culture oriented strategy to conform to the habitual use of target language, social culture and aesthetics in target market.

**Keywords:** English Brand Names, Target-Culture Oriented Strategy, Skopostheorie, Translation Method, Cross-Culture

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## 1. Introduction

A brand name identifies and represents a specific product. The function of a brand name is to help customers to identify the goods or the service offered by sellers. A brand name can reflect the quality and features of seller's products. As the international trade expands, the trade between China and other countries has also expanded. English brand names, no matter how much fame they enjoyed globally, will be difficult for Chinese consumers to recognize and accept if they don't have impressive and idiomatic translation in Chinese.

Translation is considered as a "cross-cultural event" (Snell-Hornby, 2001, p.46). The translation of the brand name should be simple, concise, and easy to remember, reflecting features of the product. A successful brand name translation is the one that helps break down the cultural barriers, promote sales of the product and enhance its competitiveness in the market. The present study aims to examine the translation strategy and

methods of English brand names from the perspective of culture. It identified the strategies and methods used in English brand names translation as well as how they fulfill the function of promoting cultural exchange.

## 2. Literature Review

There is a great amount of variation on how cultures operate within their social structure (Bandura, 1997). Cultural variables such as philosophical perspectives and value orientation influence individual's beliefs and behaviors in the society (Cortazzi & Jin 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Watkins, 2000). Individualism-collectivism constructs have been discussed by researchers in many contexts (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Hsu, 1983; Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Parsons & Shils, 1951). Triandis, McCusker, and Hui (1990) identified that individualistic cultures focus on autonomy, creativity, independence, initiatives, achievement, pleasure, competition, self-reliance and individual responsibility, however, collectivistic cultures put emphasis on modesty,



compliance, hierarchy, harmony, interdependence, obligation, duty, obedience, conformity, sacrifice for the group, tradition and integrity. Collectivists tend to think of groups as the basic unit of analysis of society while individualists tend to think of individuals as the basic unit of analysis (Nakane, 1970). Individuals in collectivist cultures are expected to act in the interests of the group and encouraged to compromise and maintain the harmonious relationships. There is much emphasis on hierarchy, harmony and saving face in collectivist cultures. They believed that “honor the hierarchy first, your vision of the truth second” (Bond, 1992, p. 83). The reason may be “a transfer of the Confucian ethic of filial piety, coupled with an emphasis on strictness of discipline and proper behavior” (Murphy, 1987, p. 43), and all these behaviors have been considered related to the Confucian philosophy and cultural heritage (Cortazzi & Jin 1996; Huang & Van Naerssen 1987; Oxford & Ehrman 1995; Tweed & Lehman, 2002), collectivist culture and relational hierarchy in social structures, or to the significance of face (Ho & Crookall, 1995; Jin & Cortazzi, 1993; Littlewood, 1999).

The Chinese tradition of seeing oneself as a part of a “relational hierarchy” greatly influenced people’s perceptions. Children are taught to respect the elders and rank and will not challenge them in order to maintain their face (Chang & Holt 1994; Hwang 1987), Chinese respect for authority is also closely related to the significance of mien-tzu (face) in the Chinese culture, and the importance of face has been discussed in many researches on cross-cultural studies (Chang & Holt, 1994; Ho, 1976; Ho & Crookall, 1995; Hwang, 1987; Jin & Cortazzi, 1993; Littlewood, 1999; Scollon & Scollon, 1994b). A person should protect other’s “self-image and feelings” and people should not be “confronted directly” (Chang & Holt, 1994, p. 115). Chinese people are expected to behave modestly and they are often found uncomfortable with presenting different opinions from others. It is believed improper or even egotistical to express personal ideas and to criticize others. It is considered selfish and shameful to cause someone to “lose face” (Bond 1996). Such kind of socio-cultural attitudes stress conformity and individual’s compliant and obedient roles in society. Scollon and Scollon (1994a) explained the differences in the way Asians and westerners perceive authority, “the Asian

focuses on the care, nurture and benevolence (or their absence) of the person in authority while the westerner tends to focus on the restriction, limitation and dependence of the person over which the authority is exercised” (p. 21). Personal fate, personal achievement, and independence are emphasized in individualistic cultures, which is operated largely by individual likes and dislikes and cost-benefit analyses.

All these cultural aspects have effects on translation. Regarding the brand name translation, only when the original brand name is adapted to the target language and cultural standards when it is translated, can the target audience easily understand what is advertised and be likely to accept the persuasion and buy the advertised product. The translation from English brand to Chinese brand involves issues of “translating a name from a letters-and-phonemes-based phonographic language (i.e. English) to a visual-character-based logographic language (i.e. Chinese)” (Schmitt & Zhang, 2012, p.656). Chinese is a logographic language, and it uses meaningful characters, which have different pronunciations (Zhang & Schmitt, 2001, 2004; Schmitt, Pan, & Tavassoli, 1994). It is known that the essential function of brand name is to persuade the audience to purchase, which implies that both content and form of the original brand name are subordinate to the persuasive function that the target brand name designed to achieve. However, due to the barriers of language and culture, a popular brand name in source language, when translated, may not be successful to the target audience. When the brand name is designed, the advertiser is sure that the source audience can understand and accept it. But when the situation is changed, the persuasive effects in source culture may not be produced in target culture. Therefore, the translation of brand names should adapt to target language style, target culture, and target audience.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

There are theories confined to the original text, and strictly conforming to the principle of fidelity, as a result, the translated text is not understandable and attractive, and some even cause troubles because of cultural differences. Translation of brand names is a form of intercultural communication. It involves language laws, cultural psychology, aesthetic interest, etc. Branding is an “image in customers’ minds

that reflects what they think and feel about a product--how they value it" (Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1999, p. 262). The criteria for ideal brand names are memorable, distinctive, and positive and preferably suggestive of product attributes (Keller, 1998). Thus, the translated brand names also should conform to these criteria. The receptors of the brand names in the receptors language should respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors of the brand names in the source language. The message produced by the translator should be interpretable and acceptable in the target language and culture. The traditional principles of fidelity and equivalence might be not applicable to brand names translation due to its flexibility.

The investigations have developed from the total literal translation or transliteration to applying the systematical translation theories, among which "dynamic-equivalence translation" is an important one proposed by Nida. It is defined by Nida as "the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message" in both meaning and style (Nord, 2001, p.7). However, Nord (2001) considers "equivalence" as "a static, result-oriented concept" (p. 35).

The Skopostheorie is an approach to translation which was put forward by Hans Vermeer and developed in Germany in the late 1970s, which is a more functionally and socioculturally oriented concept of translation. Vermeer, in opposite to the source-text centered linguistic translation theory, defined translation as a purposeful human activity that takes place in a given situation and made a breakthrough by putting forward his famous Skopostheorie which is regarded as the landmark of functional translation. The word "Skopos" means the purpose of the translation. It is a theory of culture to explain the "specificity of communicative situations and the relationship between verbalized and non-verbalized situational elements" (Nord, 2001, p.12). In the 1980s, translation was increasingly conceptualized as cultural transfer rather than a linguistic operation. Translation is appreciated as "socially-enacted communicative practices, which is oriented towards the function of the target text" (Snell-Hornby, 2001, p.46). Considering translation as one type of social action, Vermeer believes that translation is produced for particular recipients with specific purpose(s) in a given situation (Skopos).

Skopostheorie is the core theory of functionalism, which is a broad term for various theories focusing on the function or functions of texts. In functionalism, Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar is a sociologically oriented functional linguistic approach. He believes that language is what it is because it has to serve certain functions. In other words, social demand on language has helped to shape its structure. Language is a means of social interaction. "Language system and forms are determined by uses or functions which they serve" (Zhuanglin, 2006, p.307). Systemic Functional theory views language as a social semiotic which is a resource people use to accomplish their purposes by expressing meanings in context. In Skopostheorie, to translate means to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances. The text is to fulfill the expectations and needs of target audience. A translator should accomplish translation with such purpose in mind. There are three rules for Skopostheorie: Skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. The last two are subordinate to the first one and a translational action is determined by its Skopos (purposes). Vermeer explains Skopos rule as follows: "Translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function" (Nord, 2001, p. 29).

With this in mind, the source text serves as one of various information sources used by translators, and the way a target text intended to be received basically determines which translation strategy is the most suitable one. In other words, translation strategy is determined by the intended function of the target text, which may not be same as that of the source text. The target text could assume a different sociolinguistic and pragmatic significance in a different sociocultural context. Translation is guided by a purpose, but the meaning is not fixed or static because of different receivers would assign different meanings to the source text. Nord (2001) claims that, "a 'text' can be as many texts as there are receivers" (p.31).

A successful translation seems coherent to the target reader's situation and is a functionally and communicatively adequate target text, otherwise, it is not an adequate one judged by the functionalist theory. No source text has only one correct



or perfect translation. An adequate translation should coordinate the intention of the original author, the initiator, and the translator and as well fill the expectation of the readers.

#### **4. Methods**

The purpose and main functions of brand names are to make information about goods known to the public, and convince the potential consumers of buying the advertised products; therefore, a good brand name should be understandable to the target audience. The special purpose and functions of a brand name determine that its translation is different from translations of other types of text. The purpose of the translation is subordinate to the advertiser's sales strategy, which determines that the task of translators in brand names translation is to help the advertiser to promote the image of a product and enhance sales in the target market. The target audience constitutes a major factor in determining the translation procedures and the level of language to be employed (Nida, 2001). Target-culture oriented strategy is considered as the basic and guiding strategy in brand names translation. This study used the target-culture oriented strategy as the guiding strategy to analyze brand names translation. Based on the Skopostheorie and the guiding strategy in the brand names translation, the present study analyzed brand names, which were selected from the brand names database "brandirectory". Two researchers in the field of English language and translation analyzed brand names translation. They reviewed, compared and analyzed the brand names and their translation to establish the reliability of the interpretation.

#### **5. Discussion**

The first task of the advertiser is to make sure that his/her brand name is attractive and easy to understand for customers, so is the task of translators. Translators should not expect too much that the target audience would waste their time to think of the words or phrases that they are not familiar with. Customers would accept the content and form of expressions within the range of their knowledge. That is to say, the translation of brand names should adapt to target language style and target audience at the first sight. When the target audiences easily understand what the brand name means they can be possibly interested in its information and accept what is advertised and be convinced of taking certain action as the advertiser intends. If the brand name

seems to be strange and baffling, the target audience will lose interest in reading on and paying attention to what is advertised and of course no action of purchase will take place.

Chinese people tend to pay attention to brevity in naming brand. Most Chinese brand names are formed of disyllable words, usually containing two or four characters, and accordingly, translated brand names, especially for transliterated names without meaning, should not be too long. Long brand names are difficult for consumers to read and memorize especially when they do not suggest the features of the products, nor give people any favorable associations. For instance, there are some successful brand name translations which conformed to target language structures: want-want is translated as "旺旺" (Wang Wang) and Clean & Clear as "可伶可俐" (Ke Lin Ke Li). It is easy to read and the meanings in Chinese are "wealth, happiness and cleverness". The translated names not only have good associations in Chinese culture but also easy to remember. Another example is Dior, a perfume and cosmetic company, once produced a product named "Poison". As is known, perfume is usually associated with fragrance and beauty, so the brand name of perfume is normally related to nobility and romance. However, "Poison" is a symbol of death. When the perfume "Poison" went into the market, it was sold out immediately because in western countries people like to break away from conventions, and individualistic cultures tend to value personality and individual opinions and people tend to make a choice to represent their individuality and uniqueness and to stand against external social forces, such as norms (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1994.). Anything new or challenging might be welcomed. People, especially the young, tend to rebel against traditions and conventions. However, because of the culture differences, Chinese people might not accept "Poison" due to its association with death. Collectivistic cultures tend to value strictness of discipline, proper behavior, social harmony and social roles of a person (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Murphy, 1987). The cultural differences often lead to different meanings and patterns of choices (Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008). When "Poison" is retranslated into "百爱神" (Bai Ai Shen), which means everyone will love it, people would like to purchase it. Another example is "Continental", a tire manufacture in Germany. When it entered

American market it is translated into “Continental” in order to give the American a sense of speeding and freedom, but in China it is translated as “马牌” (Ma Pai). “马” (Ma) in Chinese means “horse” and it used to be an important load-carrying livestock in the past in China. Chinese people once relied on it and considered it as the treasure.

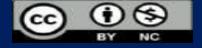
Therefore, cultural factors are important to consider in brand names translation. If the original brand name has a similar positive meaning or cultural connotation in the target language, then literal translation may be a choice, such as Peony, Panda, but as is known, “dragon” in English and in Chinese once had very different connotations. Chinese have a traditional preference for this animal because the image of dragon has already been embedded in their mind, and it is considered sacred, as the symbol of power, and has been referred as the ancestor of the Chinese nation. In English brand names translation the translator could make full use of it to appeal Chinese customers. Besides, Chinese people prefer characters that contain favorable meanings like luck, happiness, success, beauty, elegance, preciousness, beneficial, healthy, capable. It is suggested that brand translations conform to the mentality of Chinese consumers. “Coca Cola” is very popular in Chinese market because it has a Chinese name “可口可乐” (Ke Kou Ke Le), which sounds like the original name. The name is easy to read and remember. Besides, “可口” (Ke Kou) in Chinese means “tasty”. “Cola” translated into “可乐” (Ke Le) means “happiness”, which conform to the psychology of Chinese who have a deep love for a lucky name. Chinese people always attach importance to the name’s meaning and usually try best to get a good name that contains many positive meanings. A similar example is “Pepsi”, and its Chinese name is “百事可乐”, which means “make you happy in all matters”. The good sales record indicates that the translation method is the best to conform to the target culture.

A brand name has both physical and psychological dimensions. The physical dimension is made up of the physical characteristics of the product itself and the design of the package or logo---the letters, shapes, art, and colors that are used to define the graphics of the image. In contrast, the psychological side includes the emotions, beliefs, values, and personalities

that people ascribe to the product. For example, the brand image of Hershey’s is associated with not only chocolate itself but also the brown package, the lettering of the name, and the values conveyed by its current slogan “There’s a smile in every Hershey’s Bar”. Thus, a successful brand name and its translation should retain the essence of the original text as well as conform to customer’s psychology simultaneously. Brand names have the advertising nature and as soon as the product enters a market, the brand name should immediately attract its target consumers, for instance, Chinese customers can easily recognize “Pampers”. It is translated as “帮宝适” (Bang Bao Shi), and “Bang” means “help”, “Bao” means “baby”, and “Shi” means “comfortable”, showing that this product is helpful for babies and mothers. Customers can easily understand that the product is for babies and likely to be helpful for babies’ health. A similar one is “Johnson & Johnson”. The brand name comes from a person name with no original positive meaning, but its Chinese translated name “强生” (Qiang Sheng) means “strengthening the life”, which is very socially desirable and acceptable in China. “Dove” is not only a brand name of chocolate but also of soap, however, the features of two totally different items can be seen from the different translated names. As chocolate, it is translated as “德芙” (De Fu) while as a soap translated into “多芬” (Duo Fen). The first one seems to give customers a sign of good scent and taste. The second one has associations with flowers, smelling sweet and feeling comfortable. If the two translated names are exchanged, the purpose of translation will be hard to achieve and the products will not be so popular in Chinese consumers. The brand name aims for bringing consumer’s attention, satisfying consumer’s demand, stimulating consumer’s purchase desire, and finally serving with the purchase behavior, in order to achieve these purposes different translation methods have been used according to different situations.

### 5.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation for brand names can convey the original information of the product. Although it is not feasible for every brand name, literal translation still has its place in some foreign brands. In order to be able to apply this method to the translation, the original brand name should be notional words. For example, the translation of



“Playboy” into “花花公子” (Hua Hua Gong Zi). It not only maintains the original meaning but also inspires people’s interest, besides it is easy to remember. The translated name attracts consumers and promotes the sales of the product. “Microsoft” also adopts literal translation method to register its Chinese brand. Translating “Micro” as “微” (Wei) and “soft” as “软” (Ruan) successfully transmit the implied meaning: it is tiny and delicate software. The target culture is respected and the success of the translated names ultimately help to realize the function of the brand names--promoting sales of the products.

### 5.2 Transliteration

When the original brand names do not make sense to the customers literally, transliteration is often used. It can be noted that brand names of many imported products do not have actual meanings. The best way to translate them is transliteration. Transliteration means translating a certain brand name according to its pronunciation. This method helps customers easily know from the brand name that this product is an exotic thing. Transliteration can keep the rhyme and rhythm of the original brand. This method is fit for translating the brand name that comes from some special names like the inventors’ name, or the corporation’s name.

Examples of transliteration of brand names are such as, Boeing” as “波音” (Bo Yin), “Sony” as “索尼” (Suo Ni), “Adidas” as “阿迪达斯” (A Di Da Si), “Motorola” as “摩托罗拉” (Mo Tuo Luo La), and “Rolex” as “劳力士” (Lao Li Shi). Most of these words don’t have special meanings. Some of them are just copied from the corporation’ names or are coined words. English, as a phonographic language, uses “strings of easily pronounceable but meaningless letters, seem to be characterized by a higher degree of phonological processing and a lower degree of semantic processing than Chinese” (Schmitt & Zhang, 2012, p.656). In these cases, transliteration is a proper choice. In addition, for some brand names, the translator can not only use transliteration, but also endow them with associate meanings. A typical example is Nike Sneaker. Its Chinese name is “耐克” (Nai Ke). “耐” means “wearable” and “克” means “victory”. It indicates that the shoes have a good quality and can wear a long time. The translator not only translates the

brand name according to their pronunciations but also does not change its original meanings.

### 5.3 Free Translation

In order to take advantage of target language and make translated brand names more idiomatic and acceptable, some brand names are freely translated. An imaginary brand name can bring out favorable associations for consumers, who may believe that the product possesses relative attributes that could satisfy their needs. For example, concerning the American washing product “Head & Shoulder”, the translator did not literally translate it but adopted free translation: “海飞丝” (Hai Fei Si). The translated brand name makes Chinese people think of a well-known Chinese Tang Dynasty poem, from which “青丝” (Qing Si) means black hairs. Each woman wants to have beautiful and falling hairs. The translated brand name attracts the major expense group--female, and persuades them to choose this product. Another example is the drink “Sprite”, the word “sprite” in English means something is cute and in Shakespeare’s plays “Sprite” is described as lovely. In western culture, when celebrate Halloween the young would like to masquerade as sprite. However, it is not considered as favorable in Chinese culture. Translating it into “雪碧” (Xue Bi) makes Chinese people think about cool, pure, and comfortable in summer. The free translation facilitates functional equivalence. Because of the cross-cultural issues the free translation is widely used in the brand name translation.

The translated names should be brief, easy to record, arouse the customer’s interest, and best fit the target culture. When literal translation is proper it can be used to maintain the exotic style and particular structure of the original language, and when literal translation does not work the free translation can be chosen. The target-culture oriented strategy may require a faithful translation, or anything between these two extremes, depending on the purpose for which the translation is needed. There are many cases where relative literalism is precisely what the receiver (or the client or the user) needs, for example in translation of driver’s licenses or graduate certificate. What the translator should do is to compromise the two extremes and use different translation methods flexibly according to different purposes and texts.

## 6. Conclusions

Translation methods are determined by the intended function of the target text. Target-culture oriented strategy is considered as the basic and guiding strategy in brand names translation. Skopostheorie is highly practical and explanatory for brand name translation. It offers translators freedom and flexibility and they can make full use of various methods to realize the purpose of translation.

Translation serves as a medium of cross-cultural communication. With the increasing significance of brand names in international trade, it is necessary for the brand names' translators to pay full attention to cultural differences. The translation should conform to the habitual use of target language, social culture and aesthetics in target market by following the target-culture oriented strategy.

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