On the Translation of Cosmetics Brands from the Perspective of Cultural Differences between China and the West

Yidan Xu

Ningbo University of technology, Ningbo 315000, China.
Email:864821512@qq.com

Abstract: with the rapid development of economic globalization, the scale of China’s foreign trade continues to expand, and the market competition is increasingly fierce. The quality of brand name translation will directly affect the competitiveness of goods in the market. By summarizing some examples of cosmetics brand translation, this paper discusses the translation strategies of cosmetics brand and the problems that need to be noticed in translation.

Keywords: Cosmetics Brand; Translation; Cultural Differences between China and the West

1 Background of cosmetics brand translation

Since ancient times, everyone has had the heart of adoring beautiful things, among which the most prominent group is women. With the continuous development of the times, the Chinese market is increasingly internationalized, and more and more European and American cosmetics brands enter the Chinese market. How to stand out from many brands and attract female consumers has become the focus of these brands. In addition to the excellent quality of cosmetics, the translation of cosmetics brands is also the key.

Cosmetics brand name not only contains unique enterprise connotation, but also a kind of culture. A good brand name is of great value, which can bring more development opportunities to cosmetics manufacturers. The ideal trademark should have five characteristics: identification, accessibility, appreciation, adaptability and times[1]. The function of persuading the recipient to generate and implement the purchase action is achieved through the cosmetics brand name.

In the process of Chinese-English translation, cultural differences must be taken into account in cosmetics translation. In order to occupy a favorable position in such a lucrative cosmetics market, brand name translation must be combined with local culture.

2 Translation strategies of cosmetics brand names

2.1 Literal translation

Literal translation focuses on the translation of the original words and sentences, and the translated product name can match its efficacy. For example, translate "the body shop" into "美体小铺" directly because the main focus of the brand is body care products. Such translation helps consumers better understand the characteristics of the brand. "La girl" is an American affordable cosmetics brand. When it was introduced into China, it was directly translated as "洛杉矶女孩". The impression left by Los Angeles girls is
that they are passionate and fashionable, and the brand is also committed to the research and development of a series of fast-fashion cosmetics products, to inspire beauty in an innovative way, to use color art to lighten their personal appearance and lead the beauty trend. The strategy of literal translation is helpful to highlight the brand characteristics. Here are products also using literal translation: Red Earth(红地球), Little Black Dress(小黑裙), Doctor Li(李医生).

2.2 Transliteration

Transliteration refers to translating English into Chinese characters with similar pronunciation. For example, Estee Lauder, a well-known brand, is translated into Chinese as "雅诗兰黛". Its translation is very appropriate, with the meaning of elegant and beautiful, so it is easily favored by female consumers. If "Dove" is directly translated as "Pigeon", it is difficult to arouse consumers’ desire for purchase. It may even cause consumers’ antipathy and think this name is vulgar. Therefore, it is advisable to transliterate it as "多芬". The word "多芬" is easy to associate with fragrance, thus creating a good imagination. There are numerous examples like Dior(迪奥), Lancome(兰蔻) and Maybelline(美宝莲).

2.3 Free translation

It is a translation method of the name in line with the aesthetic concept of consumers which is created by the imagination according to the connotation of brand culture, comprehensive culture and other factors.

Innisfree is a beauty brand under the amore Pacific Group, the first cosmetics group in South Korea. The word "Innisfree" comes from Irish poet Yeats’s masterpiece "the Lake Isle of Innisfree", and the translator translates it as “悦诗风吟”, which makes people think of the pure and simple fragrance of nature as long as they hear the name, and feel that there is a light wind coming slowly, blowing the wind bells under the eaves, fresh and pure, clean and natural, and the mood suddenly becomes bright. Such a method of translation is indeed extremely ingenious. In 1909, Mr. Max Factor founded a cosmetics brand with his own name in Hollywood. The Chinese translation of his name, 蜜丝佛陀, came from Zhang Ailing, a talented woman of the Republic of China. It is said that Max Factor, which had no Chinese translation at that time, was highly sought after by women because of its bright colors and Hollywood influence. Zhang Ailing, who also followed the trend and bought the lipstick of Max Factor, gave it a popular translation蜜丝佛陀. In her view, although "Max Factor" is a brand from Hollywood, Chinese women should also give it a unique charm: 蜜- sweet and lovely; 丝- delicate like silk; 佛陀- enlightened life. Simple four characters describe the unique charm of women in the Republic of China.

2.4 Combining translation and free translation

This method not only embodies the charm of the original brand name, but also shows the connotative beauty of the product. Revlon’s Chinese translation is a typical example of the combination of sound and meaning. It preserves the pronunciation of the source language and expresses more profound cultural connotation. Its translation "露华浓" comes from the sentence “云想衣裳花想容,春风拂槛露华浓” in “qingpingdiao”by Li Bai, a poet of Tang Dynasty. It’s said that "qingpingdiao" is a poem written by Li Bai for Imperial Concubine Yang, which depicts her amazing beauty. Huang Chang translated the brand into Revlon, which has a strong attraction for women who pursue beauty, and their desire for consumption also increases. The same translation strategy is adopted by Clean-Clean(可伶可俐)、The Face Shop(菲诗小铺).

2.5 Zero translation

Zero translation is not to translate the original name of cosmetics brand. There are several reasons for this situation. First, because some cosmetics brand names contain very deep cultural connotation and only a few Chinese characters can’t convey their meaning, so the translator will choose to retain the original name. Second, some brands are famous at home and abroad, and sales will not be affected by non-translation. Third, the names of these brands themselves are very simple and easy for people to remember. If they are translated into Chinese again, they will be superfluous. For example: DHC, NARS, etc.
3 Problems Needed to be noticed in cosmetics brand translation

3.1 Cultural factors

In order to accurately convey the theme of the product and avoid misunderstanding, cultural differences must be taken into account in the process of cosmetics translation. For example, the French company YSL launched "Opium" perfume. "Opium" means a kind of herbaceous plant in English. Opium can make people put down the difficulties encountered and enjoy the present comfort. Choosing it as a brand name is precisely the use of its implied meaning, which originally fits the purport of perfume industry. However, in the process of translation, the translator did not take into account the image of opium in China. In China, opium is abhorrent not only because it is the name of a drug, but also because of the "Opium War". "Opium War" is the beginning of China’s semi-feudal society and humiliation. If it is publicized as a brand name in China, it will cause bad social impact. For this reason, Chengdu Administration for Industry and Commerce submitted an application to the Trademark Review and Adjudication Board of the State Administration for Industry and commerce to revoke the "Opium" cosmetics trademark. In the end, the trademark was revoked. In the process of translation, if culture is not taken into account, it will cause immeasurable loss.

3.2 Language factors

A good cosmetics brand translation must have the following conditions: smooth, attractive, and adapt to the local culture and customs. Only when it is easy to read and remember can it attract consumers better. Similarly, concise and precise wording is also a secret of brand translation. Westerners are accustomed to paying attention to the abstract thinking of formal logic, and often adopt the means of connection and combination, while Chinese prefer the comprehensive thinking of image and combination of meaning, so they often use metaphor, exaggeration, personification and other rhetorical devices. Take a typical example: "clear" is a brand that mainly promotes anti-dandruff shampoo products. The word "clear" has the meaning of "removing dandruff" here, which is concise and precise. Its Chinese translation "清扬" comes from the Book of Songs. Both "清" and "扬" describe the beauty of women’s eyes, which is extremely Oriental.

3.3 Values

In China, influenced by Confucianism, people stress "harmony is the most important thing" and are full of awe for nature. They believe that only when they live in harmony with nature, can society develop steadily. Therefore, cosmetics brands named after animals and plants often appear in cosmetics industry, such as 佰草集, 一叶子 and 相宜本草. In the west, people are deeply influenced by the Renaissance and the religious reform. They follow the principle of personal value first and value the realization of personal self-worth highly. They believe that only when individuals develop can society continue. Therefore, in the Western cosmetics industry, we often see brands named after their founders, such as Anna Sui, Dior, Chanel and Guerlain. Westerners think that this is a respect for personal efforts. Therefore, when translating cosmetics brand names, we should fully consider the difference of values, and try our best to do it in the Translation: not to erase the contribution of individuals to the brand, but also to reflect the natural beauty.

3.4 Aesthetic differences

Chinese people pursue implicit beauty. In order to win the favor of Chinese consumers, translators often choose some words with harmonious rhyme and elegant semantics as the translation of cosmetics brand names. Therefore, the frequency of "倩", "雅", and "兰" in cosmetics brand names is extremely high. Clinique and Nivea are good examples. "White skin can cover a hundred 'ugly' things." is also the traditional concept of Chinese people. They think that only white skin can be called beautiful. In the same way, people praise a woman for her "bright and watery skin". As a result, Chinese people are particularly keen on cosmetics with moisturizing and whitening functions. Therefore, the words "white" and "moisture" are often used in cosmetics, which are translated as "白皙" and "水润".

4 Conclusion

The translation of cosmetics brand name has a great impact on the development of the brand. If the translation is not
appropriate, it is likely to affect its sales volume in the market, and it is difficult to stand firm in the fierce competition. A good translation of cosmetics brand can arouse consumers’ desire for purchase and bring good opportunities for market development. Therefore, when translating, we must consider the image and concept of the brand, and combine the local culture and social concept, so that the product can occupy a position in the fierce market competition environment. This paper sums up several translation strategies of cosmetics brands and the problems that need to be paid attention to in the process of translation, and reminds the translator to combine the cultural differences between China and the West when translating. Of course, the study of translation methods and the analysis of attentions in the process of translation are not comprehensive.

References