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Drug Advertisements across Cultures

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Abstract: The present paper intends to approach the pharmaceutical text as a genre of medical discourse, focusing especially on the translation of Drug Advertisements (DA). The aim of this paper is to investigate the translation issues raised by these texts and to offer some translation strategies in order to facilitate their understanding by the non – specialist readers. One of the novelty elements of this article consists in an interdisciplinary approach of the pharmaceutical promotion texts and their analysis from different perspectives: of translation and cultural studies, of linguistics, of pragmatics and of the advertising discourse. The advertising language uses textual as well as cultural strategies in order to get the reader's attention. The understanding and the observance of the cultural values of the target audience is essential for an efficient approach to translation. Consequently, the translator needs to focus not only on the linguistic particularities of the text but also on respecting the socio-cultural differences of the target reader when interpreting the source-text. A difficult element in the translation of the pharmaceutical promotion text represents the cultural appropriateness of the sent message. The publicity of a product can be inefficient owing to the non-compliance with the socio-cultural differences in interpretation that leads to an inadequate promotion. The attempt of finding the optimum translation strategies in order to facilitate the understanding of these texts by the lay – receiver, preserving the meaning as well as the cultural atmosphere in the target text, represents another new element of this approach, given that, there are not many studies in the field literature that focus on this topic.

Keywords: Drug Advertisements; cultural appropriateness; translation problems; translation strategies; publicity discourse

Introduction

Health is one of the most important issues in society and the pharmaceutical industry, one of the most powerful economic sectors worldwide, makes money out of health- or the lack of it. After a new drug has been developed in the laboratory, tested on animals and humans, and approved by the appropriate authorities, pharmaceutical laboratories try to sell as much of it as they can. Marketing in its different forms is the tool laboratories use to achieve their goals, and advertising in particular, is one of the most important marketing strategies used by them to sell their products.

Drug Advertisements (DA) –Legal Background

Owing to possible drug-related health risks, the pharmaceutical industry is heavily regulated, not only as far as development and experimentation is concerned, but also in relation to the advertising and promotion of its products. For instance, in the EU Member States, advertising of medicinal products is regulated by law. (Title VIII of Directive 2001/83/EC on the advertising of medicines for human use). Over-the-counter drugs, on the other hand, can be advertised in the mass media to the general public. However, their potential target recipient includes not only the consumers themselves but also physicians, pharmacists and other health professionals who may be in a position to recommend such drugs to patients.

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Translations Issues - a Functionalist Perspective

Among the various research perspectives that have been used in recent decades in order to investigate and improve the translation of medical genres, the functional model has proved to be the most appropriate. The *functionalist approach* encourages translators to give up the traditional, literal perspective which involved word-by-word or sentence-by-sentence translation and focuses its attention on rendering the meaning of the source text into the target language. One of the most influential functionalist theory, introduced by Hans Vermeer (1983) provides the model based on the concept of 'skopos' or 'aim' of translation, emphasising the idea that, it is the function of the translation, its skopos (Reiss & Vermeer, p. 1984), that determines the procedure to follow in the translation process. Vermeer considers that the source text is an offer of information from where the translator will choose only the elements that will help him reach the *aim* or the *skopos* of translation. Functionalism gives up the linguistic equivalence in favour of functional equivalence. In order to achieve this functional equivalence the translator "will produce a TT depending on the specific translational norms prevalent in the receptor culture." (Rabadan, 1996, p. 130). "These pragmatic norms are indicators of the concept of correct translation in that culture" (Rabadan, 1996, p. 130). In order to produce this functional equivalence Katharina Reiss (1971) advances a 'functional oriented text -typology', (based on the Model of Language Functions elaborated by Bühler, 1934). She classifies texts according to their communicative functions into: *informative* (offer information about the real world -*referential function*); *expressive*, (express the sender's feelings and attitudes-*expressive function*) and *operative* (appeal at the receiver's sensitivity, the aim of these texts is to influence the receiver's behaviour-*operative function*). In her turn, Christiane Nord, re-examines Reiss' classification and adds the *phatic function* (to attract the target reader's attention). Nord's other significant contribution to the functionalist approach relies in the elaboration of the *Translation Brief*, 1991, (a guideline for trainee translators), and in the classification and hierarchy of the translation problems.

Drug Advertisements are affiliated to the operative - text types, displaying in the same time a phatic (attract the reader's attention) and an appellative function (convince the reader to buy the product). In order to translate appropriately this type of text, the translator should "adapt the target text to the norms and conventions of the target culture and the needs and expectations of the target audiences" (Nord, p. 51).

Translating Drug Advertisements

The translation of Drug Advertisements (DA) implies an interdisciplinary approach as it includes research from the medical discourse as well as from the publicity field. Therefore, we will investigate the publicity discourse first, in order to take up the necessary elements with a view to analyzing the type of discourse submitted to research. Defined very generally, "advertising is a marketing communication that employs an openly sponsored, non -personal message to promote or sell a product, service or idea." (Stanton, 1984) When it comes to identifying the genre advertising, Cook considers that the features characteristic of it would be "trying to sell products or services or change the reader's behavior, a repetitive language, changing constantly" (Cook, 2001, p. 221).

The translation problems of DA will be analyzed from the *functionalist perspective* which we consider the most suitable procedure in the translation of this textual genre. According to Christiane Nord, there are four main translation problems (i.e. *pragmatic, linguistic, cultural and text-specific*) which require specific transfer strategies and which should represent the starting point of the translation process. Therefore, the translator should identify these four issues before he/she starts working. (Nord, 1997, p. 47).

A difficult element in the translation of the pharmaceutical promotion text represents the cultural appropriateness of the sent message. Language skills are not the only requirement. Knowledge of local customs and culture are just as important as an understanding of idioms and syntax. Local culture and

customs can have a huge influence on advertisements. The translator must have a solid understanding of the target language's culture. He needs to create a copy that conveys the same feelings or motivations in a way that is understandable and relatable to the target audience without being offensive. What is acceptable in one culture can be deeply offensive in another. A product can be banned in certain countries if it is considered too suggestive for the culture. Advertisers must walk a very fine line to avoid failures in translation in these areas. The translator may be tasked with finding alternatives to the advertiser's slogans or text that will be acceptable in the cultural mores of the target audience. Advertisements are meant to evoke a particular response. Effective translation will help the advertiser make the same call to action in another language or even several languages. The publicity of a product can be inefficient owing to the non-compliance with the socio-cultural differences in interpretation that leads to an inadequate promotion. The attempt of finding the optimum translation strategies in order to facilitate the understanding of these texts by the lay – receiver, preserving the meaning as well as the cultural atmosphere in the target text, represents a major translation issue.

Translation problems:

Cultural problems: The translation of drug advertisements does not represent only a linguistic process but it is also considered a form of cultural communication. Translation always implies both, language and culture because these two entities are strongly connected. The language reflects the cultural reality of the community in which it is used and the meaning of texts in translation can be perceived only when they are analyzed in their cultural context. Although culture permeates texts and can be considered at a macro-level, affecting genres, conventions, functions, styles and tone, specific translation procedures for solving micro-level translation problems related to cultural references such as those proposed by Hervey, Higgings and Haywood can prove useful. Here follows a brief explanation for each of the procedures.

Exoticism: the source language is kept with no changes in the translation: e.g. *Keep it easy... Keep it Roche Applied Science*- Roche Applied Science, a possible translation in Romanian would be: *Relaxeaza-te ... Roche Applied Science*.

Cultural Borrowing: the source language word or expression is rendered without change in the target language: e.g. *lifting* instead of *ridicare faciala* (*This will give you faster topical results of plumping and lifting-Fillerina*).

Calque: the target language is similar to the source language word or expression but does not conform to target language rules, although it may be widely used: e.g. *limfom* – *lymphoma* (*Lymphoma - Immune cells switch sides-Roche*).

Transliteration: the cultural element is changed according to the phonic or graphic conventions of the target language: e.g. *scanner* is *scanner*.

Communicative: the source language referent has an identifiable correspondence in the target language that is not a literal translation: e.g. *foot-and-mouth disease* is *febra aftoasa* in Romanian. (*Goodbye Hand, Foot, Mouth Disease - Joette Calabrese Homeopathyworks*).

Cultural transplantation: the reference has been completely adapted to the target culture, has been substituted by a reference which is more in accordance with its norms or has been changed for ideological reasons. e.g. *magnetic resonance imaging* - *rezonanta magnetica nucleara-MRI-RMN* (*Magnevist-Bayer*).

Other cultural elements that drug advertisements may reflect are: systems of weights and measures, references to health systems /administrative systems, social norms dealing with ethnic groups, disabled groups, sex groups, varying degrees of formality, tenor, elements of popular knowledge, average medical education of population, status and prestige of a given pharmaceutical company.

As far as *pragmatic problems* are concerned, in Nord's view, they deal with the fact that the situations in the source culture and the ones in the target culture may differ in many aspects. These differences

are always present within the translation process, irrespective of the direction of the translation or the languages involved in the process. Nord argues that, for the identification of the potential pragmatic problems, the translator should check the extra-textual factors, such as the profile and intention of the author, the target audience, the means of communication, background of the original (text type, function, purpose, adherence to canons and trends), intentions of the translator, economic factors (payment), contractual factors (deadline, stipulation of terminology) as well as the place and time involved in the production and reception of the respective text. Owing to marketing strategies, multinational companies sometimes sell their products with *different trade names in different countries*. Just to give a few examples, the active ingredient *ibuprofen* is commercialized under the following brand names across the world: *Advil, Motrin, Nurofen, Brufen*.

Linguistic problems: In order to make their message memorable and catch the potential clients' attention, advertisements use a series of rhetorical devices (metaphors, personifications, puns, parallelisms, alliterations and repetitions) whose translation challenges sometimes the translator's skills and creativity. We will briefly introduce each of them and offer a solution of translation into Romanian.

The use of metaphors: Leiss and his colleagues, consider that "the metaphor is the very heart of the basic communicative form used in modern advertising". (Leiss et al., 1986, p. 241, as quoted in Eltorre & Riska, 1995, p. 69). Metaphors work as a way of connecting something abstract with concrete commodity (ibid). In Gherasim's view "the purpose of metaphor in specialized discourse is to *inform* (referential), to *explain* (by translating the code into a familiar image) and to *convince* (2004, p. 162, translated by me).

E.g. Spot the coughing rabbit! -Easyhaler (a medicine licenced in asthma for children). Instead of using the medical term *asthmatic* that would stigmatize children with this condition, the advertisement uses the metaphor *coughing rabbit*. A possible translation of this slogan into Romanian would be: *Priviți iepurașul care tușește!*

The use of puns: A *pun* involves 'a humorous use of word or phrase that has several meanings or that sounds like another word' (Cambridge Dictionary). *E.g. Prince puff a lot!- Easyhaler*. This slogan, plays with two different meanings of the verb *puff*. The first meaning of this verb is *to breath in repeated short gaps*; this is a common asthma symptom. The informal meaning of the verb *puff* is *show off*. The advertisement has made use of this pun in order to get the potential client's attention in an intriguing way. Instead of translating *Prințisorul respiră greu*, we will opt for using *Prințisorul se dă mare*, trying to avoid referring to the asthma symptoms and presenting reality in a playful way. Therefore, recent studies in the advertising field have suggested that the use of puns can lead to ambiguity and puns should be avoided.

The use of personifications: A *personification* represents 'the act of giving a human quality or characteristic to something which is not human' (Cambridge Dictionary). *E.g. Let the sea help you breath! – Otrivin Nasal Spray with Salt Water*. The personification used in this slogan has the function of appealing to readers' emotional responses by inducing them positive feelings. Our solution of translation is: *Marea te ajută să respiri!*

The use of parallelism: *Parallelism* stands for the 'use of matching sentence structures, phrases or longer parts so as to balance ideas of equal importance' (Cambridge Dictionary). *E.g. Pain is real. But so is hope. - Bye Bye Pain Mobile Lasers*. The parallel effect is created by a type of antithetical parallelism, presenting two opposites sides of the same reality, pain and hope. We propose the following translation: *Durerea e reală. La fel si speranța*.

Text-specific problems can generate text-specific translation errors and can usually be evaluated from a functional or pragmatic perspective. (Nord, 1977, p. 76). As discussed above, an advertisement text differ from the other text types because its function it's primarily informative. Therefore, the intended informative function should be achieved and given priority to the other functions in the translation. Otherwise, it will not be evaluated as a "good" translation for not being "functional" or "adequate to the purpose". (Nord, 1977, p. 73).

Conclusions

Pharmaceutical advertising texts can be the source of a wide range of translation problems that are inevitably related to intercultural aspects of linguistic, extralinguistic and pragmatic meaning. The source language advertisement and its adaptation to the target language culture must follow the cultural and contextual norms of their respective text systems. As has been shown, cultural distance generates problems in the translation of advertisements because of factors, such as differences in beliefs, moral values, and cultural manifestations. The cultural references in the source text must be replaced by corresponding cultural references which will produce a positive emotional response in the target language community.

Consequently, translators must have an in-depth knowledge of political, economic and social changes in both countries. They must be aware of the cultural and contextual norms in each community in order to be able to create a target text that is acceptable, informative, coherent and cohesive within the political, cultural and religious context of the target culture. (De Beaugrande et Dressler, 1977).

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