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Advertising

In brief

origins

The verb <u>advertise</u> comes from Latin <u>advertere</u>, "turn (attention) to". Curiously, although most Latinate languages have verbs derived from the same root, none of them has the commercial meaning it has developed in English (e.g., Italian *avvertire*, Spanish and Portuguese *advertir*, French *avertir*).

other names

Advertising may go under the other name <u>advertisement</u> (usually employed for a single advertising text, and progressively shortened as <u>advert</u> or <u>ad</u>) and several hyponyms, each referring to a separate form of advertisement: <u>commercial</u> (a promotional audio or video text broadcast on TV or on the radio, included in a podcast or a webstream), <u>banner</u> (a usually strip-shaped graphic ad on a website), <u>poster</u> or <u>billboard</u> (usually put out in public spaces or on public transport), etc.

E abstract

This entry lays out a short history of translation research as applied to advertising, outlining four main 'tiers' or stages. In the first tier, the focus lies exclusively with the verbal elements of the text. In the second tier, the scope of research broadens so as to embrace non-verbal elements and multimodality. A third, more holistic tier further adds the marketing context of the advertising campaign to the researcher's perspective. The fourth and final tier reflects critically on the translation of advertising in the light of critical discourse analysis, gender and cultural studies, and postcolonialism. After this analysis of existing studies, a few examples of possible future trends for interdisciplinary research will be outlined. Such trends might lead to tools and perspectives that could prove more useful when looking at the rich complexity of the translation of advertising, provided they are sustained by a systematic collaboration between translation studies and international marketing studies.

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Entry

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Fig. 1. Chinese ad for Pond's facial cream, 1925 [Source]

The history of translation in the field of advertising probably goes hand in hand with that of international trade – which means that it could potentially date back millennia, although only much more recent examples survive to this day (Fig. 1). Curiously, however, research in the translation of advertising is a relatively recent branch of translation studies, which gained some space of its own only in the 1990s. Until then, academic interest in the field remained mainly confined to teaching. Advertising texts, especially print ads based on humour or puns, were widely used to train students in "free" or "creative" translation, either as playful interludia embedded in translation courses spanning several other genres, or in dedicated courses which allowed more space for reflection on issues of intercultural and intersemiotic transfer.

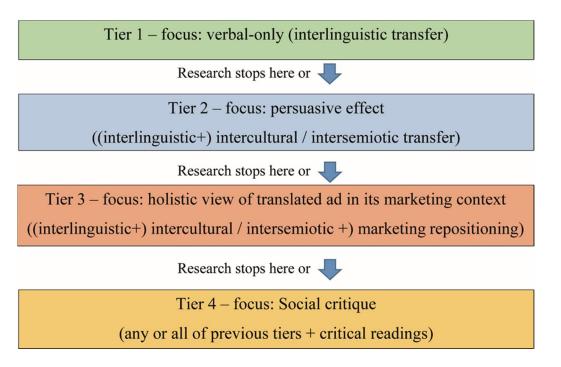


Fig. 2. The four stackable tiers of advertising translation research.

In the following, I will lay out a brief history of translation studies as applied to advertising, dividing them into four "stackable tiers" that progressively add to each other, depending on where their focus lies: studies in the first tier tend to focus only on verbal elements; the second tier broadens the scope to intersemiotic and intercultural issues; the third tier includes the international marketing context; and the fourth and final tier looks at the translation of advertising in a critical perspective.

\P A short history of translation studies in the field of advertising

The translation of advertising was initially included as one of the several text genres or case studies in translation handbooks, or in dedicated journal articles that focused exclusively on the interlinguistic transfer of verbal elements stripped of both their non-verbal (e.g. visual and/or audio) co-texts, and their international marketing contexts. Examples of this first verbal-only stage and "tier" of translation research as applied to advertising span from the special issue of *Meta* 17/1 (<u>1972</u>), titled *L'adaptation publicitaire*, to this day, and with good reason – when the research objective is to analyse the interlinguistic transfer of elements embedded in the verbal layer of the text

(which may include stylistic and cultural traits), it is perfectly sensible to artificially isolate the verbal mode from all other dimensions.

If, however, the research focus is the ways in which the overall persuasive function of the text travels across languages and cultures, one cannot help but include all the modes of expression in which the advertising message is encoded, thus integrating the analysis of verbal elements with a semiotic and/or multimodal perspective. The pioneers of this second "tier" of advertising translation research are to be found among Spanish scholars of audiovisual translation who, ever since the 1980s, included TV and radio commercials among the constrained translation genres that challenged traditional approaches to translation training (Mayoral, Kelly & Gallardo 1986). In time, Spanish audiovisual translation scholars sustained a multimodal and visual-semiotic approach to the translation of advertising, even when dealing with print ads (Valdés 2000), but with a particularly keen eye on TV commercials (Bueno 2000; Fuentes-Luque 2010). A particularly outstanding member of this approach, Valdés, later steered towards a more complex and holistic analysis of the translation of advertising, as we will see in the following.

A further broadening of the scope of advertising translation research led to a more holistic perspective, in which the translation of advertising is seen as the final, local step of global marketing strategies. In this third "tier", the object of research is not limited to linguistic and semiotic processes but includes the entire <u>localization</u> (or transcreation) process of the product itself and the intercultural transfer of the values associated with the brand. The divide between the translator's work and the responsibilities of a marketing department tends to blur out as the focus shifts to the final product of the localization process (i.e., the translated/transcreated ad) and its actual effectiveness in terms of sales promotion. This holistic view of the translation of advertising reveals that in order to fully manage a product localization process that goes all the way from linguistic to intercultural transfer, including local market assessment and perspective customer profiling, professionals should be trained both in translation and in international trade and marketing.

This kind of research was first carried out by researching practitioners or "practisearchers" (Gile 1994: 149-158), with the aim of assessing the international marketing potential of the translation profession itself. One example of this first wave of the third "tier" of research in the translation of advertising is the paper by Jettmarova, Piotrowska & Zauberga (1997), which predicted that in the following years there would be a high demand for this kind of translation in post-Soviet countries on the grounds that such countries had previously been cut off from international marketing and advertising. A similar effect was in fact observed in emerging Asian markets, especially China, which (after a period of relative isolation from international trade following earlier stages of Communism) have polarized much of international marketing investments between the end of the 20th and the first two decades of the 21st century. Asian countries therefore became particularly vibrant markets for the translation of advertising, mainly between global English and local languages and cultures. This in turn led to an ever growing number of Asian scholars in the field of the translation of advertising, championed by practisearcher George Ho. Ho argues that traditional translation theories tend to fail the test of translation practice, especially when dealing with advertising texts. In order to best represent advertising translation and its practitioners, it is necessary to shift from the current paradigms based on translated

text quality per se to a new paradigm that is based on the economic value of the translated text on the international market (Ho 2003, 2004, 2008).

After the turn of the millennium, this holistic vision of the translation of advertising steeped into its international marketing context has produced research with a broader scope, where interlinguistic, intercultural and intersemiotic research are closely intertwined with the analysis of national or local laws and regulations on advertising, or the constraints imposed on advertising and its translation by the different media on which they circulate. Examples of this second wave of the third "tier" of research in the translation of advertising are studies by Chiaro (e.g. 2004, 2009), Valdés (2007, 2011, 2013), Guidère (2000, 2009, 2011) and De Mooij, whose works will be described in more detail in the following section. Such research usually rests on the contrastive analysis of large collections of comparable advertising texts circulated in two or more markets, regardless of whether they are translated or not. This research practice helps bringing to the surface key aspects that would otherwise remain invisible in a traditional "source text vs target text" approach. One such key aspect is the practice of "glocalizing" in different languages, cultures and markets one single ghost source-text that is a collection of briefing materials (usually in Global English) sent by a corporation's central marketing department to its local marketing departments. Local marketing departments then decide how to best localize this "ur-text", which is called "multitext" by Guidère, choosing from a range of strategies from complete transcreation to non-translation as a deliberate translation choice (Páez 2013; Cómitre 2015).



Fig. 3. Ad of a skin whitening cream manufactured and marketed in China (brand deleted).

The fourth and last - but by no means least - "tier" of research in the translation of advertising adds the final lens of social critique to any one, or all, of those that progressively accumulated in the previous three tiers. The social critique of translation as applied to advertising is mainly informed by postcolonial studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA), in turn influenced by Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. In this light, translation is essentially seen as an instrument that establishes or maintains the hegemonic power of the brand being advertised (and the capitalistic and patriarchal values carried by said brand) over other cultures and value systems. An example of this may be the use of Western beauty standards in aspirational ads for cosmetics made and sold in non-Western markets, as in Fig. 3. Studies falling within this strand of research may explicitly declare their aim to awaken reader's consciences by critically discussing international advertising campaigns, like Calzada (2005). Other researchers may prefer to focus on highlighting the stereotypes and the Orientalism embedded in advertising representations, such as Sihui (2009), del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck (2009) and Corrius, De Marco & Espasa (2016). Finally, some don a less critical stance to emphasise how the circulation of translated foreign advertising has contributed to change the culture and value system of the target market, as is the case with Huang (2014) and Ločmele (2016).

Research potential

As I have argued elsewhere (Torresi 2020: 18, 2021a, 2021b: 356-358), the translation of advertising lends itself well to interdisciplinary research, due to its inherent complexity. In fact, the quality of a translated advertising text is assessed on the grounds of the practical effect it has on the real economy (i.e., whether it increases or sustains the sales of the product or brand being advertised). This promotional effect influences the translation market (Ho 2008), and product or brand marketing choices that usually are above and beyond the reach and responsibility of advertising translators, but have a profound effect on their work. For example, a marketing or sales department may opt for a "globalizing" brand communication strategy (Valdés 2008, <u>2016</u>). A globalizing strategy entails non-translation as a precise choice, or keep adaptation to a minimum, usually limited to legal notices that are required only in the target country (e.g., for campaigns promoting tobacco, alcohol or medicines). Conversely, the strategy of choice may be a "localizing" one, which requires a thorough transcreation of the brand communication, and often brand repositioning, tailored for the national or local target market.

It is easy, then, to understand how fruitful it would be to systematically intertwine functionalist translation approaches with international marketing theories and practices. Although this has never been done systematically, and seldom with an eye to both translation studies and marketing, there have been a few openings at such integration. Within translation studies, as early as in the 1980s Holz-Mänttäri (1984) saw the translation process as an action that is shaped not only by translators, but also by all other figures involved in the commissioning, production and reading of the translated text. Holz-Mänttäri's vision echoes through House's three handbooks (the latest published in 2015) and in general runs through the entire functionalist school of translation studies (Nord 2017; see Torresi 2021a: 29-32 for a fuller discussion of the application of <u>functionalist</u> theories to the translation of advertising). Such functionalist theories, however widely spread and renowned within translation studies, have so far

failed to intersect systematically with international marketing, a discipline that has traditionally been rather impermeable to the ideas and methods of translation studies and that has only sporadically foregrounded translation itself as an object of research, with few exceptions that are worth mentioning here.

In her long and fruitful research as a scholar and consultant in international and intercultural communication, De Mooij (2019, 2021) has systematically and holistically applied to the translation of advertising a categorization of cultural dimensions originally developed by Hofstede in 1981, with several expansions over the decades (the latest being Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). De Mooij's works are cornerstones of promotional translation studies advertising translation studies and are full of real-life examples of translated campaigns taken from various media. However, they are firmly grounded in international business communication and marketing, with a strong focus on the intercultural transfer of values (and only vicariously on its interlinguistic consequences). Consistently, De Mooij's publications are seldom although prominently - found in venues that are specific for translation studies (De Mooij 2004). To the best of my knowledge, until the early 2020s only Asian translation scholars specializing in the field of advertising have, similarly to De Mooij, featured in venues that focus on marketing or international business communication (a few examples in English are Dong and Helms 2001; Jing Wang 2009; Kum, Lee and Qiu 2011). This includes works that are relevant for translation studies even if they do not always rely on translation studies principles and methods, as is frequent in works that investigate how purchasing triggers vary across cultures (and therefore show the need for transcreation). Out of Asia, however, international marketing and promotional translation studies do not appear to be equally mutually permeable fields, in terms of research and publication venues.

I have already mentioned, at the end of the previous section, that the research carried out by several other scholars (like Ho, Chiaro, Valdés) follows an equal and opposite direction as De Mooij's. It is solidly grounded in translation studies and in the authors' knowledge of the professional practice of translation in the field of advertising, but it is also informed by some insight in the workings of international marketing. Scholars who look at the translation of advertising with this interdisciplinary, holistic approach (the third "tier" mentioned above), however, feature exclusively in publication venues that are dedicated to translation studies or cognate humanities. This is not necessarily due to the fact that their studies are not relevant beyond translation studies (and other humanities), or unfit for intersecting with other disciplines. More likely, this is a function of academic environments where researchers are individually assessed on the grounds of the extent to which they stay within the boundaries of their assigned discipline. As a consequence, a kind of research that is "too" interdisciplinary may hamper one's academic career. Academic institutions, at least in certain countries (like Italy or Spain), never reward seeking visibility out of one's own discipline, out of the "safe" publication venues. It follows, then, that the whole area of advertising translation research, which has a high interdisciplinary potential, is left with fewer chances of even reaching the attention of international marketing, business communication or business strategy scholars – who may well, for the same reasons, be wary of interdisciplinary contact and keep away from translation studies publication venues.

It should be noted that academic research, like any other field of real economy, is subject to market forces. If academic institutions (researchers' employers) do not

attach any value to interdisciplinary research, then there will not be any drive to conduct such interdisciplinary research, or to take it to its fuller potential (i.e., to seek publication out of one's disciplinary boundaries). This will inevitably impinge on the degree of understanding that world academia may reach vis-à-vis those fields of knowledge that are inherently interdisciplinary, such as international (therefore, translated) advertising. It will also make it impossible to implement a "translational turn" that may bring the principles and methods of translation studies at the heart of other disciplines – mirroring the "cultural turn" that brought principles and methods of cultural studies to the fore in translation studies. Translation studies may contribute many a productive paradigm to any other area of study where a notion of transfer is involved, but the first attempts at such a "translational turn", as the volume edited by Bachmann-Medick in 2014, do not seem to have been followed up. A more proactive attitude by translation scholars might help progress in that direction – but it would only be possible under less frustrating academic institutional policies.

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