

Psychological identity in advertising translation from the perspective of reception aesthetics

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Abstract: This study applies reception aesthetics to the analysis of advertising text translation. From the three perspectives of inter subjectivity, creative treason, and horizon fusion, the analysis demonstrates that the application of reception aesthetics theory in advertising translation aligns with the patterns of translational thinking activities and is conducive to explaining the phenomenon of psychological identification among the author, translator, and audience during the advertising translation process.

Keywords: reception aesthetics, horizon of expectation, appeal structure, advertising translation, inter subjectivity, creative treason, psychological identification

1. Introduction

Western literary theory in the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of schools and the emergence of numerous distinguished scholars. Beginning with Russian Formalism, it successively underwent developmental stages including Structuralism, Deconstruction, Semiotics, Hermeneutics, Psychoanalysis, Reception Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism. Among these, Reception Aesthetics stood out prominently, distinguished by its profound grounding in German philosophy and the systematic "reader-reception" research conducted by young scholars at the University of Konstanz as its breakthrough point. It ultimately ascended to the Western and global literary arenas, generating a strong sensational effect. Unlike previous studies, Reception Aesthetics transformed the original paradigm of thinking, shifting from text to reader, focusing more on the empirical reader's psychological reactions and reception of works. This undoubtedly initiated an equal dialogue between author and reader, studying the value and significance of textual existence from an entirely new perspective. It can be said that the success or failure of a translation largely depends on the target language audience's understanding and acceptance of the translated text. Advertising, with its pronounced persuasive function and characteristics as a mass communication medium that indirectly generates economic benefits for commodities, further highlights the "collusion" relationship among the translator, author, and reader during the translation process. A successful advertisement translation often serves to promote products, while an unsuccessful one may affect product sales; the audience's psychological response to the translated text is therefore of paramount importance.

2. The main tenets of reception aesthetics theory

2.1. The theoretical turn of reception aesthetics

From text to reader, reception aesthetics accomplished a paradigm shift in literary studies. In past research, "since Hegel defined aesthetics as 'the sensuous appearance of the idea,' the goal of Western aesthetics has consistently pointed toward the descriptive function of art, with art history regarded as the history of works and their authors, while the role of the reader was scarcely emphasized. The positivist objectivist view of literary history treated it merely as 'a kind of annalistic accumulation of facts.' The Marxist theory of reflection and the formalist view of literary history, though each had its merits, both 'confined literary facts within the closed circle of production aesthetics and representation aesthetics,' neglecting the role of the reader's receptive factor in literary history. [1]"

2.2. Jauss's reception aesthetics theory

2.2.1. *Jauss's elucidation of the mechanism of literary value generation*

Jauss and Iser, however, differed. Through their study of the literary theories of Schlegel, Juhl, Sartre, and others, they discovered that behind canonical works lay a vast readership, and it was this enormous readership that propelled classic works from one interpretation to another. Jauss was the first to comprehensively propose the fundamental tenets of reception aesthetics, pointing out that the value and historical status of a literary work depend upon the cooperation between creative consciousness and receptive consciousness. Creative consciousness refers to the subjective intention embodied by the writer in the work; whether this intention gains recognition depends upon the reader's acceptance. Receptive consciousness mainly refers to the reader's understanding and cognition of the work; it is related to the aesthetic object or the second text, yet possesses its own uniqueness. Therefore, for the same work, people of different eras often produce different views, and people of the same era may also have divergent interpretations. Even a single individual may develop different understandings of a work due to changes in time and place.

2.2.2. *The dynamic mechanism of reader reception activities*

Because the reader's reception of a work is not a one-sided passive reaction, there exists in the reader's mind what Jauss calls a "horizon of expectation"—a preconception whereby the reader always approaches a new work on the premise of an "aesthetic horizon of expectation" accumulated through prior experience. The manner in which a literary work adapts to, transcends, disappoints, or refutes the reader's expectation upon its publication provides the criterion for determining its aesthetic value. In the generational chain of reception, the effect of a work undergoes tremendous changes, while the reader's horizon of expectation also constantly transforms and renews itself in the developmental process of literary creation. "When the work a reader reads aligns with his own aesthetic experience and horizon of expectation, the reader will instead lose interest in reading that work; but when the work a reader reads exceeds and corrects his horizon of expectation, the reader will often be elated, believing that it has elevated his aesthetic level, enriched his aesthetic experience, expanded his horizon of expectation, and established new aesthetic standards for himself. [2]"

2.3. Iser's micro-analytical approach

Compared with Jauss, Iser pursued a completely different research direction. He remained more faithful to textual analysis, adopting a more microscopic and accessible approach. Building upon Ingarden's phenomenological studies, he proposed the concept of textual appeal, revealing a universal fact: the text itself, which can only be realized through the reader's re-creation, possesses numerous "blanks" and "negations"—namely, blanks as open-ended connectivities within the text, and "gaps" and "negations" as non-thematic portions within the reference field of the "wandering viewpoint." Throughout Iser's lifelong research, there were three domains: the text, the process of reading the text, and the communicative structure of literature. Through these, he hoped not only to clarify how meaning is produced, but also to clarify literature's impact upon the reader. In other words, Iser placed greater emphasis on the reader's interpretation of the text and the reconstruction of textual meaning. Literary texts constantly evoke the reader's reading expectations based on existing horizons; however, the purpose of evoking such reading expectations is to break them rather than to cater to them, thereby enabling the reader to acquire new horizons. Thus evoked, the reader fills in blanks, connects gaps within the text, and renews the textual structure within his theoretical horizon—what is termed the "appeal structure of the text." The appeal structure of a work refers to the literary work itself, which leaves uncertainties and blank points requiring the recipient to concretize them; appeal constitutes the most fundamental structural characteristic of literary texts.

3. Advertising translation: a reception aesthetics approach

3.1. The inter subjectivity of creator-translator-audience

3.1.1. *The theoretical turn in advertising translation*

As global economic integration continues to advance, advertising increasingly highlights its practical and popularizing functions. As a special type of text, the creation of advertising is akin to literary creation, and in some cases even transcends it, requiring comprehensive consideration of numerous elements including text, information, sound, color, length, and audience psychological reactions. While advertising translation may appear to be merely a linguistic code-switching activity on the surface, it is in fact a secondary creation that similarly demands consideration of multiple factors, among which the audience's psychological identification is the foremost concern. Modern hermeneutics, particularly Gadamer's interpretive theory and Habermas's communicative theory, provides the theoretical foundation for this understanding, no longer viewing translation as an isolated linguistic conversion activity but rather as an intersubjective dialogue process among author, reader, and translator.

3.1.2. *The re-creative practice of advertising translation*

Consider the following examples: Good to the last drop. Drip by drip, rich aroma, leaving a lasting aftertaste. (Maxwell Coffee). In this advertisement, the original creator fully considered that this is a beverage product advertisement, where color, aroma, and taste are the most prominent elements to be highlighted. As advertising language is most concerned with high condensation, striving for conciseness and clarity while making the audience willing to accept and respond psychologically, the advertisement uses the word "good" to summarize color, aroma, and taste, while "last drop" stimulates the audience's imagination and eagerness to try. Similarly, when translating this advertisement, the translator pondered both the creator's intention and the target language audience's psychological acceptance. Thus, the above translation not only preserves the original text's qualities, spirit, and style; it also engages in re-creation within the target language, so as to enrich, expand, and extend the life of the original work. As a result, "rich aroma" corresponds to "Good," "drip by drip" corresponds to "drop," and "leaving a lasting aftertaste" corresponds to "last"—truly perfect in every respect.

3.2. The translator's creative treason to the original text

3.2.1. *The theoretical breakthrough of the translation dilemma*

"From 'loyalty' to 'treason,' it seems that two extremes constitute translation: 'loyalty' in practice often makes the translator unable to attend to one thing without losing another, while 'treason' intellectually makes the translator find it difficult to accept. This dilemma is a predicament that everyone engaged in translation will encounter. [3]" However, when a text is introduced into a completely new cultural context, the environment upon which the text relies for its survival undergoes significant changes, and deviations in understanding the original work inevitably arise. According to reception aesthetics theory, the existence of the text's "appeal structure" leaves certain uncertainties and blank points in the text itself, and it is precisely these uncertainties and blank points that readers are meant to fill through reading. Only when a fusion of horizons is achieved between reader and text does meaning truly emerge and reading is ultimately completed. Therefore, in the process of advertising translation, due to the individual differences of the receiving subject, sometimes a completely literal word-for-word translation of the original text may not truly achieve fidelity to the original; on the contrary, appropriate "tampering" with the original text can better achieve the desired effect, which in translation studies is termed "creative treason."

3.2.2. *Practical examples of creative treason in advertising translation*

Consider the following examples: First: Make yourself heard. (Ericsson). First version: Understanding is communication. Second version: Communication is boundless. Second: Carlsberg: probably the best beer in the world. First version: Probably the best beer in the world. Second version: Strength is the source of charm. Third: Feast your eyes. (Pond's Cucumber Eye Treatment). First version: Feast your eyes. Second version: Nourish the windows of your soul. Fourth: What it's like to be small but good. (Tavern). First version: It is small, yet good. (Small as a sparrow, but fully equipped.) Second version: A small inn, yet superlative enjoyment.

In the above examples, the second versions of the translations all exhibit the phenomenon of creative treason, that is, "disloyalty" to the original text. However, it is precisely this "disloyal" act that truly expresses the exact meaning of the target language culture, making the translations more vibrant and

appealing. In the second version of the first example, the translator's use of the word "boundless" fully embodies the powerful function of this communication tool, while no corresponding word appears in the original text. The first versions of examples first, Third, and Fourth are basically literal translations of the original text, but the effects are not ideal. On the contrary, the second versions in these three examples not only take care of the original text but also consider the psychological acceptance of the target audience, achieving two goals at once. Taking the fourth example as an example, this is an advertisement for a small inn, intended to show that although the inn is small, its service facilities are complete. If the first translation method "It is small, yet good" is adopted, it appears plain and unremarkable, insufficient to attract customers; or if "Small as a sparrow, but fully equipped" is adopted, it may easily make customers feel displeased or even disgusted; while adopting "A small inn, yet superlative enjoyment" directly points out the theme and uses seductive language, making it quite enticing.

3.3. The audience's horizon fusion with the translated text

3.3.1. *The theoretical foundation of reception aesthetics in advertising translation*

Gadamer made the following observation in *Truth and Method*: "Understanding should not be conceived as if it were a subjective act of an individual; understanding is a process of placing oneself within a tradition, and it is precisely in this process that past and present continually merge." Therefore, reception aesthetics places particular emphasis on the reader's understanding and acceptance of the text, and the prerequisite for this acceptance is that a fusion of horizons can be achieved between reader and text. Every literate reader always approaches reading with a preconception; when what he reads aligns with his horizon, he will feel disappointed and abandon reading. On the contrary, when what he reads exceeds his expectations—that is, when an aesthetic distance exists—he will instead strive to concentrate on reading that text and ultimately achieve a new fusion of horizons. It is evident that "the beauty that needs to be reproduced in translation includes beauty at the levels of language, culture, psychology, and so forth. [4]" In advertising translation, if the translated text is rendered plain and unremarkable, it will certainly fail to attract the audience; but if the translated text is both novel and peculiar without losing the essence of the original, it can not only leave a deep impression on the audience but may also arouse the audience's desire to purchase.

3.3.2. *The practical manifestation of horizon fusion in advertising translation*

Taking the De Beers diamond advertising slogan "A diamond lasts forever" as an example, its translation "A diamond is forever, a single one to be passed down through generations" is truly a classic. This is an advertisement that integrates both visual imagery and text, with a distinctive opening scene showing a couple strolling through a green maze, when the male protagonist suddenly departs, leaving the audience in suspense. Only when an exquisite diamond ring slides down a red thread from the tip of Cupid's arrow onto the girl's left ring finger does the audience suddenly realize the implication. Clearly, the advertisement fully considers the audience's psychological response, appearing not only in a special form but also embodying the "eternal love" quality of the diamond ring in a most warm and romantic manner, thereby achieving the purpose of touching people's hearts. As for the Chinese translation, its neat textual arrangement displays solemnity, its precise word choice conveys elegance, and the use of quantifiers highlights preciousness.

Another example is the coffee advertising slogan "Hot as Passion / Dark as Devil / Pure as Virgin / Sweet as Angel / a Cup of Bali / Kirrin's Coffee," translated as "As scorching as passion / As dark as the devil / As pure as a virgin / As sweet as an angel / A cup of Bali coffee / Kirrin leaves an endless aftertaste". The first four lines alone are sufficient to capture the audience's attention and arouse their curiosity—what on earth could be so charming? The last two lines immediately clarify the theme. In this way, the audience develops an intense desire to try it, which cannot but be attributed to the translation being spot on.

4. Conclusion

Advertising translation must not only ensure the reproduction of the linguistic artistry and style of the original advertisement, but also consider the psychological feelings of the target language audience. Successful advertising translation demonstrates the intersubjectivity among the creator, translator, and audience. Generally speaking, only when advertising translation conforms to the audience's aesthetic psychology can it obtain widespread recognition from the audience and generate purchasing behavior.

5. References

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