

The Reconstruction of Women's Images in Translated Online Advertising

Rekonstrukcja wizerunku kobiet w tłumaczeniach reklam online

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Keywords

Women, images, transfer, advertising, domestication, foreignization, connotations

Słowa kluczowe

kobiety, wizerunek, transfer, reklama egzotyzacja i udomowienie, konotacje

Abstract

The purpose of my research is to apply two strategies of translation coined by Venuti (2001): Domestication and Foreignization (that are normally used in textual elements) on the reconstruction of women's images from source online advert (English) into target online adverts (Arabic). Using Barthes' model: Connotative and Denotative meanings (in Chandler 1994), the research has attempted to discover whether the connotative meanings of women's bodies (as iconic signs holding cultural messages) are domesticated/adjusted to fit the Arab norms or whether they are foreignized/preserved in their foreign identity. By comparing 100 English online adverts and their rendered versions into Arabic, the study has revealed that domestication is highly used to adjust or omit elements (e.g. nudity) in women's images in Arabic versions. Although covering female bodies conforms to the cultural and religious norms of the Arabs, this inevitably disrupts the semiotic patterns of the advertisements and obscures some important messages of the original adverts. It is remarkable; however, that very few trans-

lated Arabic advertisements chose replacement as a domesticating strategy to replace English models with Arab one.

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest omówienie zastosowania dwóch strategii tłumaczeniowych, o których mówi Lawrence Venuti (2001): udomowienia i egzotyzacji (zwykle używanych w tłumaczeniach pisemnych) do rekonstrukcji wizerunku kobiet jaki się wyłania z reklam internetowych tłumaczonych z języka angielskiego na język arabski. Przeprowadzając badania, oparte na modelu znaczeń konotacyjnych i denotacyjnych Barthes'a, autorka próbowała dociec czy konotacyjne znaczenia wizerunku ciał kobiecych, traktowanych jako ikoniczne symbole o pewnym przekazie kulturowym, zostały udomowione/przystosowane do arabskich norm czy raczej egzotyzowane/zachowane w swojej zagranicznej tożsamości. Analiza ponad 100 angielskich reklam internetowych przetłumaczonych na język arabski pokazała, że proces udomowienia jest często stosowany aby przystosować lub pominąć pewne elementy, takie jak np. nagość, w arabskich wersjach reklam. Chociaż szczelne okrywanie kobiecego ciała jest zgodne z kulturowymi i religijnymi normami Arabów, to jednak w sposób nieunikniony zakłóca semiotyczne wzorce i zniekształca ważny przekaz oryginalnych reklam. Jest to jednak zastanawiające, że tylko w nielicznych przetłumaczonych na arabski reklamach zdecydowano się w ramach strategii udomawiania zastąpić zachodnie modelki arabskimi.

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Introduction

Although research on advertising has increased lately, very few works have been written about strategies of translating advertising in the Arab world (e.g. Adab, 1998; Guidère, 2000; Al-Shehari, 2001, Al-Agha's, 2006). These studies were based on textual translation in printed adverts from magazines, newspapers, catalogues, etc. To my knowledge, no study has ever investigated foreignization and domestication strategies of translation in visual elements (e.g. women's images) in online adverts.

1. Aim of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of foreignization and domestication strategies (Venuti, 1995) in the reconstruction of women's images in advertising from English into Arabic. The study also aims at finding out to what extent these strategies affect the message(s) of the images in target advertisements. It is expected that the outcome of this study will provide localizers with a further insight into the role of translation strategies in localizing not only textual elements but also iconic elements in online advertising.

2. Venuti's (1995) theory: foreignization and domestication

Foreignization is a strategy which "deliberately breaks target linguistic and cultural conventions by retaining some of the foreignness of the source text". Domestication refers to the "invisibility" of the translator in the target text; that is to say, the target text is "perceived as if it was originally written in the target language" (Qtd in Hatim, 2001, 45). Venuti (1995) recommended that foreignization should be used since it helps "restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others" (Venuti, 1995, p. 33). According to him, this strategy makes the foreign elements in the target text visible and thus makes the cultural differences clear to the target readers; it is, therefore, a form of resis-

tance “against ethnocentrism and marginalization [of other dominant cultures]” (Venuti, 1995, p. 33).

Foreignization in translation was firstly formulated in Germany during the classical and Romantic periods, specifically by German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. In 1813, the latter argued that: “either the translator leaves the author in peace... and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace... and moves the author towards him.” (Venuti, 2004, p19-20).

Venuti (2004) advocates and practices a resistant translation strategy, a term synonymous to foreignization, because it locates the alien in a cultural other, pursues cultural diversity, foregrounds ,the linguistic and cultural differences of the source-language text and transforms the hierarchy of cultural values in the target language (p308. Qtd in LiliWang, 2013).

3. Barthes’ (1985) model: connotative and denotative meanings

Denotation refers to the “literal, obvious or commonsense meaning of a sign” (Chandler, 1997, p.91). Connotation, on the other hand, refers to “the socio-cultural and personal associations e.g. [cultural], ideological, emotional, etc of the sign” (Chandler, 1997, p.91). These are “typically related to the interpreter’s class, age, gender, ethnicity and so on. Signs are more polysemic – more open to interpretation – in their connotations than their denotations” (Qtd in Chandler, 1997, p.92). According to Barthes (1985), the image of an advertisement “forms an iconic message. This message in turn is divided into coded or connotative message, and non-coded, denotative message” (Qtd in Al-Shehari, 2001, p.95). Following Barthes model, the overall message of an image, in this study, was divided into two messages, denotative and connotative. The focus was on how connotative messages were reconstructed from English into Arabic; that is to say, whether they were domesticated or foreignized.

4. Participants

The study comprised 100 participants took part in this study. They are all familiar with translation studies; some of them are university teachers of translation, others are PhD candidates and master students conducting research on translation and some others are translators. Participants (63 females and 37 males) are from different countries in the Arab world such as Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Qatar, Syria.

5. Corpus

One hundred online adverts in English (the source language) and their translated version into Arabic (the target language) were randomly selected from a wide number of websites of cosmetics and fragrances because the latter portray females more than other websites of other products. The selected adverts feature female bodies as “iconic signs” holding cultural concepts and erotic connotations.

6. Data collection

The data was collected using a questionnaire based on Likert scale; it is “a five point scale used to allow the individual to express how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement” (McLeod, 2008). From this scale, the respondents chose the answer which best reflected their opinions (e.g. very frequently, frequently, don’t know, rarely, never).

7. Procedure

The participants were given images of the source and target adverts to be observed; they were asked to extract the denotations and connotations of the images observed, then they were asked to find out whether these connotations were foreignized or domesticated in target (Arabic) adverts. They were, finally, asked to provide their answers (in the questionnaire) about how frequent each strategy was used. Apart from these two main strategies, there were other sub-strategies that were also observed in this study as they were indicators of foreignization and domestication. A sub-strategy of foreignization is a transplantation of images; it means maintaining the source images as they are in their foreign form. A sub-strategy of domestication is a transmutation of images; it refers to the modifications and adjustments that the translator/marketer introduces to make the target image looks more local; such as omission of nudity or covering women’s bodies through the use of Photoshop or some other tools.

8. Data analysis

This study adopted a mixed method of data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative methods since they complement each other. The frequency of domestication and foreignization as well as their impact were treated quantitatively. Still, there were responses that could not be reduced to codes; for instance participants’ analysis of the images and the connotations extracted; these answers were, thus, treated qualitatively.

9. Results

Foreignization (18%) and its sub-strategy of transplantation (16%) were rarely used in the transfer of women's images into Arabic adverts.

Domestication (66%) and its sub-strategy of transmutation were found by most participants to be very frequently used in target images.

Concerning the impact of the strategies investigated, 44% of participants claimed that domestication affected connotations of target images to a large extent.

Only 9% of participants claimed that foreignization affected the connotations of target images.

10. Foreignization

Venuti (1995), recommends the use of foreignization as a form of resistance against “ethnocentrism and marginalization” of other foreign cultures. This study, however, discovered that there are other motives, different from those enumerated by Venuti, that lead marketers and translators to adopt foreignization in the transfer of advertising images into Arabic: Foreignizing women bodies in the adverts of cosmetics and fragrances plays an essential role in the promotional campaign by being the “master voice” of the company, its authority, expertise and international recognition. It is also used to attract the attention of potential consumers to the unnaturalness of the image of the product (Baluwka, 2006, p 35), and to emphasize modernization, prestige, power, freedom and success; these are all qualities that are attractive to most Arabic women. Still, foreignization is not very effective in reconstructing images from a source culture to a target culture. This study has revealed that many connotations are lost when the product is advertised in the Arab market where the images rely on their foreignness. In an Add of a fragrance called *Insolence* introduced by the American actress *Hilary Swank*, the image of the actress is transplanted in the Arabic version. The image in the original version connotes the idea that this fragrance makes a woman feel as seductive as this actress. The communicated promise of this fragrance would be understood by the Arab consumers only if they knew the actress *Hilary Swank*.

11. Domestication

Venuti criticizes the use of domestication stating that it leads to the “invisibility” of the source culture and to the translator's manipulation of foreign cultures imposing his or her own culture on target readers. Yet, this strategy was very frequently used in reconstructing women's images into Arabic ad-

verts. Only very few instances, in this study, indicated that domestication was helpful in making the target image familiar and meaningful to the consumers. While in the majority of adverts analyzed, the inappropriate use of domestication distorted the connotations of the original adverts.

The significant use of domestication in women's images in the Arabic adverts is mostly motivated by cultural, religious and ideological constraints. Translators tend to transmute, adjust, or omit elements in women's images to fit the norms of the Arab culture and religion. The bodies of naked or semi-naked women in the English versions were generally manipulated through the use of tools such as Photoshop so as to cover their nudity or remove it. So, supporting Al-Shehari (2001) this study has stressed that almost all adverts show that there are semiotic relationships that exist between brand names as linguistic signs and images of models' bodies as iconic signs. The messages transmitted by these adverts are lost when the images are omitted; although removing elements such as eroticism conforms to the norms of the Arab culture and religion, "it inevitably disrupts the semiotic patterns of the advertisement and obscures some important messages of the original texts" (Al-Shehari, 2001, p. 259). This can be clearly depicted in the example of an online advertisement called *Good-bye Cellulite* by *Nivea*; the source image shows two American women wearing bikini on the beach, they have very beautiful skin (of hips and thighs) free from cellulite; they are happy, comfortable and they enjoy themselves. The image connotes that the cellulite cream can have this effect on you and, thus, you will have as nice skin as these American women. On the contrary, the Arabic advert has been domesticated (replaced by another image); it shows an Arabic woman at home; only the upper part of her body is displayed. She is wearing a T-shirt that shows only her neck and a small part of her chest, she is touching her chest skin, she is hardly smiling. This target advert is supposed to tackle the disappearance of cellulite that normally appears on thighs, hips and buttocks. However, the image is misleading since it does not reflect the theme of the brand name *Good-bye Cellulite*; there is nothing in the picture that shows the disappearance of cellulite in the woman's body. The inappropriate use of domestication of this target image has altered the original connotation; besides, it has emphasized the difference between western women who are free and Arab women who are striving for freedom.

Conclusion

Venuti's (1995) tackled translation into the Anglo-American target cultures. However, this study focused on translation from the Anglo-American source cultures into the Arabic target cultures. The use of foreignization

might be useful in “dominant” Anglo-American cultures; it might not affect their cultural identity. However, the use of foreignization in the “dominated” cultures, such as most of the Arab countries, is not very useful since this strategy leads to cultural hegemony more than cross-cultural communication; indeed, the use of foreignization in the advertisements targeting the Arab world stresses the “foreign” identities and obscures the Arabic one. So, contrary to what Venuti claimed, domestication should be also used (besides foreignization) in target images to resist hegemonic, powerful Anglo-American cultures.

Finally, to guarantee an effective communication of translated adverts, a combination of both domestication and foreignization should be used in target images. In order to gain more market share and profit; domestication should be used appropriately in images to help in bringing the foreign cultural connotations close to the target consumers.

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