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Influential Translation of Advertisements from English to Arabic for Arab Women Consumers

Randa Saliba Chidiac^{a*}, & Marie-Thérèse Saliba^b

* Corresponding author: Randa Saliba Chidiac, randasaliba@usek.edu.lb

^aHoly Spirit University of Kaslik, 446 Jounieh, Lebanon, randasaliba@usek.edu.lb

^bLebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon, marie-therese.saliba@umontreal.ca

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Abstract

Advertising is a fundamental communication tool for the consumers. It tells them the types and diversity of products available for their use in the market. Advertising isn't restricted to any age or gender. The ultimate aim is to sell the consumer new items that have been made available. It's important to use glitzy and striking ads to attract consumers into buying.

The Arab world is still importing most of its ideas when it comes to ads. A problem is encountered when translating ads in the Arab world. This is not due to lack of trying as many individuals, organizations and government policies are striving but failing to reach satisfactory results. Digital technology has also added to the issues already confounding the Arab translation crisis. Books and newspapers have been discarded in favor of online and television media outlets.

With globalization comes the importance of preserving content of the original ad in terms of meaning and slogan. The translation can be done by taking the slogan and molding it into the new ads. It can also be literal which can be problematic because the original slogan was intended for a different audience belonging to a different culture and tradition.

Our focus will be on the possible hurdles facing translation of US advertising into Arabic for the Arab women consumers. The two regions have different strategies and languages. Often in literal translation, the original slogan becomes lost in translation. One example is the Swarovski Online Magazine.

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1. Introduction

Our research is related to descriptive evaluation type, which, from a problematic situation of socio-demographic nature (ads in Arab world) develops questioning to frame the variables involved in this study (Laurencelle, 2007). As a result, we have proceeded by shedding the lights on representative samples of this situation to draw rigorous explanations. The background, methodology and measurement of this research are involved in a near-theoretical space.

Advertising is a fundamental communication tool for the consumers (Leech, 1966). It tells them the types and diversity of products available for their use in the market. Advertising isn't restricted to any age or gender. It makes use of various media outlets and involves a number of diverse practices and approaches. The ultimate aim is to sell the consumer new items that have been made available. Ads also aim at conserving the already established customer base. This can be done by introducing new features into existing products to keep sales up.

The Arab world is still importing most of its ideas when it comes to ads. A problem is encountered when translating ads to the Arab world. This is not due to lack of trying as many individuals, organizations and government policies are striving but failing to reach satisfactory results. Digital technology has also added to the issues already confounding the Arab translation crisis. Books and newspapers have been discarded in favor of online and television media outlets.

Our focus will be on the possible hurdles facing translation of US advertising into Arabic for the Arab women consumers. The two regions have different strategies and languages. Often in literate translation, the original slogan becomes lost in translation.

So what are the hurdles that face translation? What are the best methods to breach the gap between maintaining the integrity of the message and making it relatable to the Arabic audience?

1.1. Context

Advertising has gained access to all fields of the social order: arts, culture, sport, fashion, politics and even religion, for the reason that not any single discipline can exist in such a competitive market without endorsing itself or being exploited by products/companies as a medium to endorse itself. Bear in mind that advertisements encompass great powers economically and culturally in addition to its importance in mandating norms, values, lifestyles and consumer trends. According to some studies, a consumer responds positively to an advertisement once it is compatible with his own culture.

Culture plays a primordial role in the advertisement strategies especially in areas like the Arab world where taboos are widespread. That is, the advertising approaches are planned and shaped in a way that fits the consumer's culture and needs.

As we all know, globalization has turned the world into a global village where international communication has become a necessity. Although English is considered as the common language in business, so many people cling to their mother language and refuse to be integrated in English. Thereby, translation has turned out to be a key factor in the marketing and advertising fields. This idea is emphasized by Al Agha (AGHA, 2006) who wrote: "The past few decades have witnessed an increased demand for the translation of advertisements from English into Arabic because most products

and services available in Arab countries are imported from American and countries which use English as the language of commerce.”

1.2. Problem statement

Unquestionably the cultural factor in translation is very important because a significant communication can only happen when the message conveyed through texts is well understood by the communicants. Nevertheless, understanding can be attained only if the information contained in language units is complemented by background knowledge of facts referred to in the message. In fact, people speaking the same language usually have the same cultural background. It is consequently comprehensible that translating this shared knowledge may be critically imperfect. English and Arabic linguistic systems are different and it is crucial for the translators to be conscious about these differences because they may cause the translator problems and affect the Arabic translation's quality. Studies have identified that the main areas of linguistic problems in English-Arabic translation are the morphology and the syntax (such as conjunctions, prepositions, adjectives, adverbials etc.).

For starters, some words may lose their meaning if we translate them, especially if the advertisements hold some proverbs or quotes which will make translation hard and sometimes meaningless. The idioms and proverbs in the English language are used a lot in advertisements given their powerful effect. These idioms shall never be translated word by word as the sentence would look weird in Arabic and incomprehensible. But also translating the meaning of these idioms is not enough alone, as the expression should have the same effect on the target audience to achieve its target (tonality, rhyme). The first challenge is to translate the meaning in a creative way, and the second challenge is to generate the same effect as in the English.

The second problem that we generally face is ideological due to the difference in the way Arabic and English people think. For example, an advertising containing seduction or some nudity would not make any problem in western societies, however, such advertisements cannot be shown in our Arabic societies.

The third problem in translating the advertisements is religious since some words or quotes may contradict with religions especially Islam. Religious barriers are the strongest to stand in the way of the success of those campaigns. Take for example the lingerie advertisements. In contemporary Western society, the extent to which a woman may expose cleavage depends on social, cultural and regional context. But the lingerie advertisements are seen differently in our world especially in Islamic world. Nudity is prohibited in any form. Islamic culture is very conservative. Skin can be shown only on face, hands and feet. In order to protect their citizens from the depraved West, censors had to make extreme efforts. That's when Photoshop and other available means like a black marker, paper and glue come into the play.

With such unsatisfactory results, why are companies and institutes still insisting on using translation instead of coming up with new advertisement campaigns?

1.3. Research questions

Yet, the problems of translating advertisement remain the capital controversial subject in this sector. So, what are the problems of translating advertisements from English to Arabic to the Arab Women Consumers?

2. Research Methodology

The subject of our paper has no shortage of material to be gathered from various sources. The idea itself came about while translating the Swarovski Online Magazine from English into Arabic for Arabian women. Lebanon is the epicenter of the Arab world when it comes to fashion as Lebanese women have always been in tune with the latest worldwide trends. During the last few decades, Arabian women from all over the Arab world have become known for their keen sense of fashion and sophisticated taste. The cultural and religious barriers have always presented a challenge for them. Even if they admired the product, they would be turned off from buying it because they don't understand the message behind it. When it became apparent that this is more than just a handful of isolated incidences, it became a topic of personal interest.

The Internet is an excellent source of information for our research. There are many papers that discuss the topic of marketing, advertisements and translation. This is necessary because every paper has to be based on specific definitions before delving into the research part. Another important asset was finding examples about the advertisements that show how detrimental translation can be if it fails to maintain the spirit of the original meaning.

3. Reasons behind the Faithful Translation of Advertising Slogans

For the sake of clarity, faithful translation means either the transference of the original advertising slogan into the target advertisement or a literal translation of the source slogan into the Target language (TL) (Guidère, 2000). The holders of international companies may require importers to maintain the same meaning of the original advertising slogan to ensure the cost-effectiveness of the international advertising campaign (Myers, 1997). This is because the campaign is often built on a slogan or mascot that has taken years and even decades to promote. For example, the American cigarette brand Marlboro has a cowboy as their mascot and he is known as Marlboro man. Everyone associates that image to the product. Having that image distorted in any way will make all the investment made null. Importers may also aim to ensure cost-effectiveness by hiring non-specialist translators to translate the original advertising material including the advertising slogan. It can be very expensive to dedicate an independent campaign to every region, and sometimes country, all over the world. Some international companies might be able to afford that, but it still takes a considerable amount of money and resources that any company would rather not spend. Non-specialist translators who may not be familiar with marketing translation may merely conduct a literal translation of the original advertising slogan and

unintentionally cause a loss of the originally intended aural and pragmatic effects. While some might question the severity of these opinions, the examples below highlight their importance.

Let's take some examples from Swarovski Elements online Magazine. It is a monthly online magazine written in English and translated into Arabic targeting the Arab Women fashionistas, interested in latest trends, jewelry style, interviews with famous artists and fashion designers all around the world.

3.1. Example 1: An advertisement slogan promoting "Victoria's Secret Lingerie" (See figure 1 and Table 1)



Fig. 1: Victoria's Secret Lingerie ("Swarovski Elements Online Magazine-
<http://mam.swarovski.com/pindownload/login.do?pin=7L22CX> ", May 2015)

Table 1: Victoria's secret Lingerie (Baalbaki, 1994; Nasser, 1996)

WE LOVE VICTORIA'S SECRET	نحن نحب Victoria's Secret
VICTORIA'S SECRET : Angel Wing Necklace	قلادة Victoria's Secret: Angel Wing
VICTORIA'S SECRET: Angel Wing Ornament	زينة Victoria's Secret: Angel Wing
THE VICTORIA'S SECRET DESIGNER COLLECTION	مجموعة تصميم Victoria's Secret
Amour Cheekini	Amour Cheekini
SEXY LITTLE THINGS:	أكسسوارات صغيرة مثيرة
BraPanty & Blindfold Gift Set	مجموعة حمالة صدر وسروال & هدية عصابة للعينين
THE VICTORIA'S SECRET DESIGNER COLLECTION	مجموعة تصميم Victoria's Secret
Amour Unlined Demi Bra	حمالة صدر Amour Unlined Demi
THE VICTORIA'S SECRET DESIGNER COLLECTION	مجموعة تصميم Victoria's Secret
Lacy Halter Teddy	Lacy Halter Teddy
HEAVENLY LUXE: Eau de Parfum	عطر Heavenly Luxe:
THE VICTORIA'S SECRET DESIGNER COLLECTION	مجموعة تصميم Victoria's Secret
Bustier	مشد
THE VICTORIA'S SECRET DESIGNER COLLECTION	مجموعة تصميم Victoria's Secret
Leather & Lace V-String Panty	سروال رفيع V من الجلد والدانتيل
THE VICTORIA'S SECRET DESIGNER COLLECTION	مجموعة تصميم Victoria's Secret
Summer Chiffon Babydoll	مجموعه بيبي Summer Chiffon

We can see that images are culturally sensitive. Whereas it is common to see pictures of women in bikinis on advertising posters on the streets of London, such images would cause outrage in the Middle East.

3.2. Example 2: An advertisement slogan promoting "MASCULINE ELEGANCE" (See fig. 2)

When translators literally translated the English slogan "Man up, Girl!" into Arabic (تهيأني) (Rothwell, 2007) which has the meaning of (Get Ready), it led to the disappearance of the English meaning and therefore to a loss of the originally intended graphic (and even aural) effects in the literally translated version. Alternatively, advertisers may merely transfer the English advertising slogan into the Arabic advertisement to maintain the originally intended effects.

A possible version of a literally translated Arabic advertising slogan: *ترجلي يا فتاة* Arab Women known for their femininity will not accept such translation (to act like a man). In the Western countries, it may not be offensive for women to be characterized by certain masculine qualities. They even take it as a compliment and a sign that they are able to compete in the aggressive world of business. However, for Arabian women, even though they want to be taken seriously as career women, are very sensitive to any be likened with any masculine traits. They value their femininity more than the average Western woman. Mooij (Mooij, 2004) rightly states that the disadvantage about the use of English advertising slogans in TL advertisements is that the Target Customer (TC) who do not have a sufficient knowledge of English may misinterpret the intended meaning of the English advertising slogan.

The advertisement for Swarovski's "MASCULINE ELEGANCE" features a close-up of a woman's face on the left. To the right, several jewelry items are displayed with their names: a Swarovski Border Pendant, a Swarovski Bright Cross-Black Pendant, a Swarovski Black Bracelet, a Swarovski Pazzo Grande Automatic Silver 175 watch, a Swarovski Crystal Myriad - Moonlight ring, and a Swarovski Ball Stone Black Cut Link bracelet. The central text reads "MASCULINE ELEGANCE" in large, bold letters. Below this, a "SHOP NOW" button is visible. At the bottom, a woman is shown wearing a black tuxedo jacket. The text at the bottom of the ad reads: "MAN UP, GIRL! When we buy presents for our other half we always keep ourselves in mind. This holiday season, play with gender codes, always keeping it elegant. Mix these accessories with a black tuxedo, and you and your man are good to go. Let your girlfriends know that it's time for some CROSS-GENDER dressing—completed with this ultra-cool watch. It's time, babe!"

Fig. 2: Masculine elegance ("Swarovski Elements Online Magazine: http://crystals.swarovski.com/magazine/2014/issue36/Masculin_Elegance.en.php ", May 2015)

3.3. Example 3: An advertisement slogan promoting “EYE ART” (See fig. 3 and Table 2)

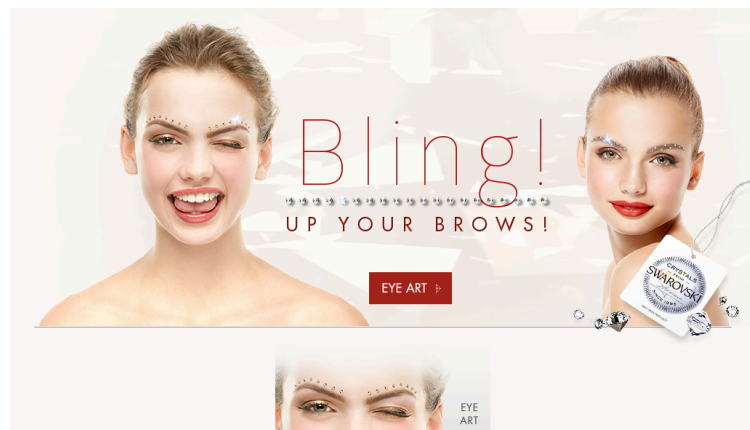


Fig. 3: Eye art

Table 2: Eye art translated

Bring!	اجعلوا حواجبكم
Up your Brows!	متلألئة!
EYE ART	EYE ART

As we notice in the example 3, English companies use slang English (Chapman & Kipfer, 1995) and abbreviations to advertise their products since it attracts more audience even if the words are grammatically wrong. This, in particular, is difficult to translate because the words might have a different meaning in Arabic than what was intended. There is no word (Bling) in Arabic, so an explanation was required by saying: make your eyebrows shining.

3.4. Example 4: an interview with the American photographer

We can notice the rhyme in English, but when we translate it into Arabic, the rhyme was lost *الليل هو الليل* (Al layl houwa el waqt el mounaseb) to explain that the nighttime is convenient (Xiasong, 2004). According to Xiaosong, the use of a slogan which does not rhyme with a particular advertising slogan may not be effective. A literal translation may also lead to a loss of the originally intended aural effect into the target Arabic version as is illustrated in example 4.

A possible version of a literally translated Arabic advertising slogan: Nighttime is the right time
 "الليل هو الوقت المناسب" (Al layl houwa el waqt el mounaseb).

4. Cultural impact

Culture plays a central role in persuasive advertisements. Objects, ideas and concepts are created in a cultural context and conveyed by linguistic or non-linguistic signs. Brislin (Brislin, 1990) defines culture as recurring patterns of behaviors. Arab countries in particular have many cultural limitations that stand in the way of accepting some messages in certain advertisements.

In the Arab culture, people show respect to their elders by addressing them in the plural. A simple he/she cannot be substituted because then the idea behind the use of the plural address would be lost. Hence, in addressing an elderly person, the plural form or replacing it by a simple “you” will lead to

disrespect in translation. The Western civilization has respect for its elders, but they tend to be less vocal about it. They see no need to use specific pronouns or words when addressing them. If the advertisement came from a Western country, it will never occur to them that such a need needs to be met.

Dress code or garments used and the symbols behind each of them also pose a problem for a translator. For example, a Japanese widow normally wears white clothes when her husband has died but in Arab culture, a widow normally wears black clothes for forty days. So as we can see customs and traditions are part of a culture, the story and the significance or hidden symbolism behind it becomes a stumbling block for a translator. Not only will the translation confuse a person, it will always cause offense. No matter how good the product is, there are always many decent alternatives in today's competitive market. So it's essential to keep all you consumers satisfied while trying to attract new ones with advertisement campaigns.

5. Translating Logos

Any advertising, including logos, should be forcibly adapted to local cultural values and the Arabic language. In order to do this, you must know what various animals symbolize, what symbols indicate and how those or other subjects can be interpreted in Islamic countries. For example, dogs are considered to be "dirty animals", so you can rarely see them in advertising. Fish symbolizes Christianity, a crow – death, and a chameleon – hypocrisy.

Any manifestations of supernatural forces (witches, wizards, vampires, aliens) can be interpreted as equating to God, and therefore their demonstration is prohibited. In addition, the words "create" and "greatest" should be used really cautiously as they are also associated with God.

Drugs, alcohol and even an empty glass of champagne cannot be used in advertising. Homosexuality and any hints at a non-traditional sexual orientation are also under the strict prohibition.

6. Translating Taboos

The notion of taboos in this context relates to any advertisement which contains sexual references, references to political figures, swear words, bad language, etc.(Smith, 2006) in order to attract the attention of the text receiver. Most of these elements are used in the British advertisements for humor and persuasive purposes. However, the transference of these factors labeled as taboos into Arabic will most of the time be rendered as non-humorous, unpersuasive, offensive, unsuccessful and unacceptable by the social morals of the Arabic audience which would find the use of such elements neither entertaining, funny nor persuasive (Guidère, 2006).

The American or English ads naturally employ models or actors and actresses of the country whom are completely different from Arabs. For example, when broadcasting an ad for any kind of cereals outlining its importance to help women stay fit, the actress is more likely to be an American or European model completely different from the Lebanese or Arab women. From this standpoint, Arab women do not feel directly concerned by said ad or in contrary, aiming to look like the model would be losing their true identity. They do not want to look like those women who have pale skins and colored eyes. They want those products to exemplify their colorings and ideals of beauty.

7. Conclusion

There is no doubt that translation has contributed greatly in bringing various cultures of the world together on different levels and different life aspects. However, translation is not the simple process that it might be seen to be at surface, but it is rather complex and painstaking in some aspects, especially when we have to take into consideration the difference in culture and tradition from one country to another.

If an advertisement has to be translated from English to Arabic, translators have a difficult role; they have to conform the idea originally stated to the cultural norms of the Arab world while keeping the original meaning.

Dynamic translators usually use a method called Arabization when translating advertisement from English to Arabic; they take the original contents and reshape it to match Arab mentality (e.g. Dominos Pizza's "Happiness is just a bite away" slogan is translated into Arabic as follows: **الطعم يحكيك** / the taste will tell you).

The translator should also be an innovative writer and must have the ability to switch between different styles in order to echo the tone and style of the original work. It's imperative for the translators to start a serious and large scale process of adaptation which necessitates an exceptionally high energy, good-will and objective thinking in order to produce an advertisement reflecting the spirit of the original one.

We undertook this research with the intention to give concrete information on the value of creating a suitable translation glossary for fashion. Our aim is to motivate translators to follow a contemporary translation for fashion.

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