

# The translation of trademarks from the perspective of consumer psychology

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**Abstract:** Trademark is a bridge connecting customers and products or services. <sup>[1]</sup>It is the concentration of commodities' remarkable characteristics, as well as the core of commodities' culture. As a particular form of translation, trademark translation is not simply a matter of finding equivalent expressions in the target language for the source brand name, but the renaming process that translator adapts to consumers mental world which contains cognitive and emotive elements. A well-translated brand name can cater to potential consumer psychology, providing detailed information about products, and giving audience aesthetic appealing and inspiring consumers' purchasing desire to buy the products. The present article confines the study on the translation of some well-known brand names, abundant examples are given in detail and I analyses the translating techniques and strategies under the guidance of the theory of consumer psychology. In addition, the thesis intends to arouse more attention to and interest in the study of consumer psychology.

**Keywords:** English trademark; translation method; corporate culture; consumer psychology

## 1. Introduction

In fact, to have a good translation has much to do with the translators themselves.

First and foremost, translators should be omnipotent. That is, they should have competence in amalgamating various cultures and be familiar with all the subjects, such as culture, folklore, aesthetics, psychology, and other aspects of knowledge. It is no doubt that different people have different behavior criterion, the way of thinking, and no one in any society or culture can slide over this fact. In this article, I attach importance to customers' psychology element.

A brand might be considered to be the personality of the product or service. An effective brand will tell the customer what to expect from the product and even how it impacts or benefits their lifestyle.

## 2. Successful Cases of Trademark Translation

A trademark is a product name or logo, which leave the first impression on people, and have directly impact on consumers' visions, hearings and psychology. Therefore, excellent translation of brand names is very important. Superior ones have a clear vision, proper methods of translating in overseas markets lead to a great success.

### 2.1. The World-known Trademarks

Coke Cola, Colgate, Gillette, Safeguard, Lenovo, McDonald's, Canon, Head&Shoulder, Benz, BMW, Lancome, Nike, Puma

### 2.2. Some Common Ground between the Above-mentioned Trademarks

As is known to us all, trademarks have informative functions, the above-mentioned brandnames perfectly reflect commodity performance and their features as well as cater to mentality of local consumers. For example, McDonald's is the possessive form of the owner's name and western companies always named after the founders' family name as the custom persisted. Disney and Ford Motor Company are best examples to support this. But it is absolutely different in China. Chinese are often fond of words with lucky and flourishing meaning. For example, Parkson, Quanjude and

Sheridan. It is featureless to translate McDonald's into the restaurant of McDonald. However, Maidanglao catches the eye of Chinese. It is a combination of Chinese and Western features and is after Chinese consumers' heart at the same time. Eating is absolutely an important part of Chinese culture as well as working. This interpretation essentially implies that one should work hard to welcome the wheat harvest. It is no doubt that eating fast food in McDonald's prevail in every corner of our country. Coincidentally, Coca Cola is another example. Coca and cola are names of two plants used to produce Coca Cola. Coca leaves even contain cocaine and widely used as drug. You can imagine how boring and dreadful to make a verbatim translation. Such the ability of modern translators to make capital out of a dangerous situation. Coca Cola is obviously a successful case in that it promote its delicious taste and capture the hearts and minds of people. It reminds people of its perfect taste and make people happy.

### **3. The Essential Factors in Trademark Translation**

To make a comment on a specific translation of foreign trademarks, is depends on not only some common principles, but also the factors that influence the translation. That's why the translation of foreign brandnames is such a complex subject in itself. The influencing factors will be discussed in the followings.

#### **3.1. Be Concise and to the Point**

Being concise and to the point requires that the translated trademark should be short, vivid and easy to read and memorize. No matter it is a Chinese trademark or English trademark, the rendering of them must be concise so as to leave a profound impression on the consumers. "Conciseness" indicates that trademark carriers much information in just a few words. If a trademark is too long or complicated, nobody will be remotely interested. Generally speaking, "two or four syllables are appropriate". To the point implies that the brandname should try to attract the potential consumers' attention in a simple way.

A good brand translation should be readable and imaginable that can give more details and information. We are familiar with the scene that when a person stops his steps around a franchised shore and read the catchy rendering aloud.

#### **3.2. Beauty in Sense, Sound and Image**

Stimulating consumption means that trademarks can arouse consumers' interest and persuade them to buy the product. A good trademark can not only provide information about the product but also please the consumers. In other words, a good trademark must be aesthetic enough to give consumers feeling of a sense of beauty. There is no doubt that a trademark which is beautiful either in form or in content can instantly attract consumers. For instance, Clean & Clear, Coca Cola, Sprite.

One kind of female cosmetics, named "Avon" is translated into Chinese "Ya Fang", "Ya" means elegant and "Fang" means as beautiful as a flower. Then when people read the words "Ya Fang" they may get an association with an elegant and pretty girl. Such an effect of having white and beautiful skin is what this product can bring.

Another example, (Cai Hong), a trademark of TV set, is translated as "Irico" (Iris+Company), but not "Rainbow Company" ("Iris" is the goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods in Greek mythology). Because the later rendering is redundant and too interminable to memorize that the consumers will have no interest in them and cannot remember the trademark at all. So "Irico" is much better to be employed by the consumers. There are some similar examples: (Yun Shan), a trademark of tea, literally translated as "cloud and mountain". But it is not appropriate, so it can be translated as "Cloutain", the combination of cloud and mountain, which is under the principle of being concise and aesthetic. In Guangdong Province, there is one leisure destination called (Jin Wan You Yue), the English name for "the Evening Romance", translated just right. And similar examples exist in English trademarks such as shampoo trademark Rejoice, translated as "Piao Rou", reminds of the Ink-black hair, loose and unbound, cascaded over a lady's shoulders. Also, Safeguard conveys a sense of smoothness and comfort, if rigidly adhere to literal translation or semantic transliteration method, then the results get greatly reduced, and there are similar cases of successful trademark Cannon, Pampers, HP and so on.

As we know, “Benz” has been in a top for a long time in the field of cars With a special and superior quality—fast, which is what all the drivers want. “Benchi ”is a good translation to “ Benz ” .When people read it , a fast running horse may come up to you . So the name “Benchi” may just tell you : “ Look ! this is Benz ! ”

Let's come to another brand “Nike”. “Nike” is a brand for a series of sports products, being famous in America and even all over the world. It is also the name of Goddess of Success in the Greek mythology, symbolizing success. While we translate it into Chinese name “Nai Ke”, it implies that this series of sports products has the trait of good quality and are durable. If you wear them, you might get the blessing of Goddess of Success and would get success in the future. Hence it is good to expand another way to the original pronunciation of the trademark association or from the nature of goods to start, get rid of the original trademark literally bound to open up new ideas and create a unique and in line with the Chinese translation of the aesthetic ideas, in a very rational way to resolve trademark translation of some tough questions.

### **3.3. Customs and Habits Factors**

Different countries have different customs and habits. The same object in different culture contains different values, associations and connotations. Take “Yutu” (a famous cookie ) as an example. In Chinese mythology, it is a bunny living with a fairy maiden called “Chang’e” on the moon. Chinese people are fond of it and prefer to apply “Yutu” to products which are related to the moon. “Yutu” is well-known in China. However, if we translate it literally into Jade Rabbit, foreign customers cannot understand it. As a result, it had better be translated as Moon Rabbit, which may be more easily accepted by foreigners in that they would conceive of a lovely and romantic image of this trademark and think about myths and legends. Another example “Dongfeng” is a famous brand in China, the name has long been praised by many famous poet. If we translate it literally, we'll get "East Wind", which has an opposite meaning in English. In England, East wind comes from the North and brings coldness and unpleasantness, while mild winds has been described in Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”. “Hongdou” is the brand name of shirt produced in Jiangsu Hongdou Group. The brand makes Chinese people think of a well-known Chinese Tang Dynasty poem, “The red beans grow in southern land. How many loads in spring the trees? Gather them till full is your hand; They would revive fond memories.” “Hongdou”, a name with a rich poetic flavor, gives people many favorable associations. The lovesickness seed used as a love symbol in China will arouse the young people nice feeling. It can make those who have passed their glorious youth review their “Hongdou” stories in the mind and it may “take” overseas Chinese back to their motherland. The brand name benefits from its brand culture and nice feelings. That's why “Hongdou” shirts are widely welcomed among Chinese. For instance, one kind of exporting battery is named “Bai Xiang”. It is translated into English directly as “White Elephant” .It may be an exactly right translation . But , in English , “ a white elephant ” is a usage , meaning a waste of money because it is completely useless. See, who will be so foolish to spend the money on a burdensome possession or a useless rubbish ? One more example to illustrate this point is “ Bailing ” , one kind of pen made in Shanghai , is translated into English as “ White Feather ” directly . As a result, it fails to take in the market oversea. What is the reason ? In English, there is an idiom “to show the white feather” , whose meaning is that deserting on the eve of a battle . That is to say, a white feather has the connotation “a coward. Assuming that when someone sees a pen in your suit pocket or in your hand, what would they think of you? What would you feel when you realize that you are regarded as a coward?

That is to say, differences in customs and habits are reflected in the translations of brandnames, Translation is not only important but also very difficult. Different situations may require the translators to adopt a different treatment according to the different cultures between the source language and the target language.

## **4. Important Principles of Trademark Translation to Adapt to the Potential Customers’ Mental World**

In this part, I will discuss some principles of trademark translation catering to the mentality of customers. Religious beliefs, regional culture, consumers’ cultural psychology are involved.

### **4.1. Providing Attractive Information for Consumers**

From the above mentioned, trademarks have informative functions, providing information about

products for the consumers. When translating a trademark, try to choose the words which can reflect the remarkable features of commodities as well as possible so that it helps to promote the goods. When translating Chinese trademarks like exclusive words, daily words into English, people should respect this principle as well. Some renderings come from the pronunciation of the source language of the trademarks. They have no practical significance in the target language, but it can make the consumers have feelings of a sense of beauty of rhythm and experience different culture containing in the trademarks, which can attract consumers effectively. For example, “Kang Jia” is a famous Chinese TV set trademarks, whose English rendering is “Konka”. The rendering is concise and sounds like with a rhythm for the two syllables of “Konka”. So the rendering can impress the consumers a lot although it has no practical meaning in English. Translating trademarks from source language into target language is in the purpose of expanding the overseas market and stimulating consumption. A good rendering of trademarks can deeply influence the psychology of the consumers. Therefore the translator must make a good choice of the words to cater to the mentality of the local consumers. For example, “(Ya Ge Er)” is a best-known Chinese trademark for clothing. Its English rendering is “Youngor” which is sound like “younger”. It seems that you will look younger if you put the clothes with this trademark on. As mentioned above that westerners hate to be considered old. So it just caters to the mentality of the consumers in western countries of keeping young, so who will disfavor the products with this trademark?

Another example, “Extra”, a chewing gum brand, is translated as “Yi Da”, of which “Yi” implies that it is beneficial to people, reflecting the designer’s idea that chewing this gum will be beneficial to people’s teeth. “Safeguard”, a brand for soap and bathing lotion, is translated as “Shu Fu Jia”. Here “Shu” means “comfort” and “Fu” means “skin”. So this translation will leave the impression to people that this soap or lotion can bring comfort to the skin. “Colgate”, a brand for toothpaste, is translated as “Gao Lu Jie” with the character “Jie” meaning “clean”, indicating that it can make peoples’ teeth clean and tidy.

#### ***4.2. Distinguishing the Goods from Other Merchandise***

Being commodities, different products or services of the same character have different quantities, qualities and services. Trademarks are like the faces of the products. It is not difficult to see that different brands have the same function to distinguish one kind of products or services from another kind, just as the function of persons’ names. However, brands can do much better than persons’ names can do. Because brands are the signatures of products or services and none of them are repeated. A good trademark translation may bring an enterprise huge wealth, whereas a bad one may let an enterprise suffer great loss. Therefore, an enterprise’s future is closely linked with trademark translation. That is to say, when the consumers read a brand in a store or a public place, they can easily and quickly judge what kind of product or service the brand is related to. And brands help the consumers to be aware of the differences between a certain product and other products or a service and other services of the same kind and remember them.

Generally speaking, consumers would seldom or never make a mistake to choose the product or service what they want by reading the brands, just as they never make a mistake to call out somebody by calling one’s name.

#### ***4.3. Catering to Religious Beliefs of Consumers***

We live in an increasingly secular society. However, religion is a diffuse topic liable to unending disputation. And it still plays a role in trademark translation as religious beliefs affect our concepts and behavior of consumption to a large degree. Avoiding religious conflict would help a lot in the process of trademark translation. Otherwise it will lead to the tremendous drop in sales and even a ripple effect.

Different countries may have different religious domination. In China, Buddhism and Taoism are the main religions, which have deeply influenced the Chinese in the history. It is not a coincidence that there were many trademarks like “Fo Tiao Qiang” (Buddha climbing over the wall) (food). However, most of westerners believe in Christianity, so that, some figures or images of English trademarks come from the Bible, for example, “paradise”, “Eve”, “Adam” and so on.

There are many mythologies and legends from the religions. In China, the character “Long” (dragon), which is considered as the supernatural being from the heaven, a holy creature and has become the symbol of five-thousand-year civilization. Thus, today as an auspicious creature that may bring good luck, many Chinese trademarks are created with the character “Long” (dragon), such as “Jin Long Yu” (cooking oil), “Hong Jin Long”(cigarette). However, they may be of unfavorable connotations in Western countries. Westerners considered dragon as a dangerous and horrible creature.

#### 4.4. *Respecting Local Traditional Culture*

It is believed that where there is language, there is a culture hidden behind. But what is culture? There are many definitions of culture by different people from different angles. And up to now, it seems that no one has come up with a universally accepted definition of culture.

Cultural difference is the main cause of cultural barriers in trademark translation. And cultural differences play an important role when translating trademarks into target language. There is no doubt that the translator must respect the traditional culture in the target market environment when he or she translates trademarks into the target language so that the rendering of the trademark will be popular in the consumers. For example, “Wu Yang” is now the symbol of Guangzhou, which is from the legend of five celestial beings coming from the South Chinese Sea on the backs of five goats to Guangzhou. The Chinese designers make good use of this trademark to describe the look and the speed of the bicycle “Wu Yang”. It was once translated as “Five Goats” in English for exports. But “goat” has the denotative meaning that a man is very active sexually. So guess who would like to buy the products with such an absurd trademark. With this in regard, it is better to translate as “Five Lambs” which may be better accepted by the western consumers.

Besides this factor, China is a great country with a long history. The ancestors of Chinese created many miracles and wonders with their intelligence and diligence. Because of this origin, old age is considered as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Thus the character “old” often show up in Chinese trademarks, such as “Lao Gan Ma” (flavoring essence), “Wang Lao Ji” (decoction tea), so on and so forth. However, it is totally to the contrary in western countries about “being old”. Westerners hate to be considered old. Even for some of them age is a heavy burden. They tend to emphasize on youthfulness, new ideas and innovation instead of life experience. For this reason, trademarks which look young will be very appreciated, such as “Maidenform” (women’s underwear). There exist many other elements in culture.

##### 4.4.1. *Names of Plants and Animals*

Also, many animal names are used as trademarks. Some animals share the same associative meaning in English and Chinese, such as: pigs are dirty and gluttonous; monkeys are playful and naughty; wolves are fierce and cruel. But because of the variety of culture, some other animals cause different imaginations.

In western countries, dogs are considered as men’s best friends, because they are thought as the symbol of faithfulness, loyalty, reliability, bravery and cleverness. So they have the trademark “Ye Gou” (Dingo) (automobile). While in traditional Chinese culture, dogs usually contain bad associative meanings and often appear in abusing expressions, such as “*Zhou Gou*” (servile follower), “Gou zui li tu bu chu xiang ya” (a filthy can’t utter decent language) and so on.

Chinese people have a profound national feeling about “Mei” (plum blossom), “Lan” (orchid), “Zhu” (bamboo) and “Ju” (chrysanthemum). In addition, “Song” (pine), “Mei” (plum blossom) and “Zhu” (Z(bamboo) are called “Sui Han San You”, meaning literally three good friends in cold winter. These plants are associated with the noble, unyielding manner of a person. While in western countries, these words are just common names for plants without any associations. “Lancome” (first-class cosmetic from Paris) is translated into Chinese “Lan Co”.

##### 4.4.2. *Nonequivalence in Referential Meaning*

The referential meaning shows the relation between the sign and referent. And the referential meaning of Chinese trademarks are somewhat unique to the Chinese culture. So that, in some cases, a word in Chinese trademark cannot find an exact counterpart in the target language in referential meaning. Take “Tai Chi” as an example. “Tai Ji Quan” which is a Chinese form of physical exercise to keep mind and body well balanced and it is culture-specific. A plaster named “Tai Ji” is prone to evoke its medical functions in Chinese people’s minds. Before the introduction of “Tai Chi” into Western culture, Westerners have no idea what it is. Besides, many trademarks produced by quoting from literary works or historical figures is Chinese culture-specific. For example, “Kong Yiji” which is the trademark of a kind of flavored aniseed produced in Zhejiang Province. It comes from one of Lu Xun’s novel. The novel is popular among Chinese people, and Chinese people are familiar with the character “Kong Yiji”. But if it is translated into English as “Kong Yiji”, then in term of culture the referential meaning is lost. The trademark fails to fulfill its informative function and the target consumers cannot identify what it is. So it is maybe said that it is difficult for foreigners to understand Chinese trademarks which are culture-specific

##### 4.4.3. *Color words and figures*

Here, I will take “red” and “black” as the example. “Red” means happiness and good luck in China.

Thus red is the color often used in Chinese trademarks, such as “Hong Qing Ting” (shoes), “Hong Niu” (Red bull)(beverage), “Hong Jin long”(cigarette), “Hong Shuang Xi”(table tennis). However, it is totally opposite in English. Most times, it means unlucky, bloody, cruel, dangerous, disaster loss, etc. So there are some phrases with “red” to express something bad, such as “in the red” (in debt) “have red hands”(commit a murder,) “red flag”(obscenity.)“Black” in English often contains some negative meanings. There are many terms indicating this phenomenon, such as black money, blacklist, black market, blackmail. In addition, black implies misfortune, gloom. For instance, “black day” (unlucky day), “in a black mood” (in low spirits). Although black does not indicate some good thing in China, a Chinese enterprise produces a type of toothpaste named “Hei Mei”, which informing consumers that even a girl with black teeth, her teeth would turn white if she use the toothpaste “Hei Mei”. While if it is translated as “Black sister”, it will give offence to the Blacks.

In China, people warmly receive the number 6, 8 and 9. Chinese people often endow the number “6” with the meaning that everything goes well, “8” means making a fortune, and “9” implying lasting long. So that there are trademarks named after this three numbers, such as “Liu fu”(jewelry), “888”(bicycle), “999 Gan Mao Ling”(medicine). But in western countries, “7” is a propitious number bringing happiness and fortune, just as the number “8” in China. So “7” is employed in trademarks, like “7-up”(soft drinks) and “Mild-seven”(cigarette). Some Chinese trademarks are well translated with regard to this point, for example, “Qi Pi Lang” (Septwolves) (men’s clothes) (“sept” derives from Latin, means “seven”). In addition, “13” is connected with bad luck and disaster.

## 5. Conclusion

Trademark is not only a logo, also a lure, the final goal of which is to attract consumers and sell goods and commodities. Consumers’ psychological needs to a great extent determine the realization of the intended functions of trademark translation. The translator should use the methods as transliteration, free translation and the combination of the two to translate trademarks from Chinese to English under the direction of translation principles such as reflecting commodity performance and its features, catering to mentality of local consumers, respecting local traditional culture as well as being concise and aesthetic. So as to achieve the “functional equivalence” and the correspondent meaning of the trademark translation, and make the renderings can be accepted by consumers as well.<sup>[2]</sup> In view of this, I hope this article on the trademark translation could give everyone concerned a little inspiration to some ideas relating to meet Consumers’ needs.

## References

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