

ADVERTISING MESSAGE CUSTOMISATION/ STANDARDISATION AND CORPORATE AND CONSUMER CULTURE

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Abstract: *Advertising translators should be familiarised with the cultural conventions in the target market so that they can re-create the message conveyed in ads. However, advertising message adaptation depends not only on the customer profile but also on corporate culture. The paper focuses on the correlation between these elements and the linguistic choices made by some copywriters.*

Keywords: *cohesive devices, collocations, culture, localisation, speech acts, standardisation*

1. Introduction

There are many factors that impact the degree of advertising adaptation. They are related either to business environment (e.g. the country of origin image, political-legal environment, business and innovation environment, competitiveness level, corporate culture, type of product and scale of production, stage of product life cycle, quality/ price ratio of the product, brand familiarity and fidelity) or to audience environment (e.g. advertising and media strategies, media variety and technical conditions, the translator/ copywriter competence, noise and message perturbation, customer profile and needs, individual/ group culture and mother tongue, customer's income). This article discusses the role played by two factors – corporate culture and consumer culture – in advertising adaptation.

The reference corpus of this study consists of pairs or groups of Romanian (Ro.) – foreign ads (i.e. British – Br./ American – Am./ Australian – Aus. ads). It was gathered between 2003 and 2009. The print ads promote products such as perfumes, cosmetics, cars, refrigerators, digital cameras or laminate floors. Some advertisements have two variants (v. 1, v. 2). Their texts were modified, or their texts *and* illustrations were modified by advertisers during the advertising campaign. The images of some Romanian ads are identical with the images of the foreign versions of the ads and the texts of the foreign ads are literally translated into Romanian, but some Romanian and foreign ads texts/ pictures, or texts and pictures differ from each other.

2. A Brief Literature Review of Consumer Culture and of Advertising Communication Strategies Employed by Multinational Companies

Taylor, Miracle and Chang (1994) and Firat (1995) explain why multinational corporations standardise their advertising campaigns. Multinational enterprises want to create and maintain a consistent image and identity throughout the world, by using the same brand name and brand image across markets. Advertisements are standardised because, as Séguinot (1995:65) stresses, “[a]ge and lifestyle may be more important than national culture”. For example, adolescents and business travellers are each a global target market. Another reason

why advertising is standardised is that “truly creative and effective promotional campaigns are a scarce commodity” (Fatt apud Taylor, Miracle and Chang 1994).

However, as Guidère (2001) points out, some companies adopt a different policy and adapt their advertising campaigns. The researcher in the field of translation studies distinguishes four types of companies according to the degree of advertising localisation: the *polycentric* company, which is for its advertising campaigns customisation and adapts them to the consumers in each country; the *regiocentric* company, which adapts its advertising campaigns for the target consumers who live in a region; the *ethnocentric* company, which rarely adapts its advertising campaigns; the *geocentric* company, which does not adapt its campaigns.

Guidère’s point of view can be illustrated by the pieces of information I received from some Romanian marketing and advertising practitioners. Stoia (19/05/2010, e-mail), Stângă (19/05/2010, e-mail) and Ecsedi (18/05/2010, e-mail) affirmed that the multinational companies in which they worked/ had worked could be included either in the ‘polycentric’ or in the ‘regiocentric’ type of company. They explained to me that *Volkswagen*, *General Motors* (which produces *Holden/ Opel/ Vauxhall*) and *Toyota* decide what message should be conveyed to the European consumer and, moreover, that they are interested in adapting their advertising campaigns to the peculiarities of each European country. Referring to the advertising adaptation in general, Cristina Petrea (8/07/2010, e-mail) provided me with more details on the advertising communication strategy adopted by multinational companies. She wrote to me that the communication tool-kit (i.e. the spot, the radio commercial or the layout for the print and internet adverts) is developed in a centre of communication planning located in a big city of a certain continent and afterwards more or less customised by the advertising agencies in each country. The elements that are adapted in the target country are: the picture of the endorser, the voices of the actors, the packshot (i.e. the picture of the product), the source text, the slogan, the logo.

In her research, De Mooij (1998, 2007) implies that all companies who advertise their products worldwide should adopt the policy of the *polycentric* and the *regiocentric* companies. The Dutch scholar who has advised companies (e. g. *Canon*, *Epson*, *Friesland Foods*, *Shell*, *Unilever*) and advertising agencies (e.g. *Ogilvy & Mather*, *Publicis*) on international branding and advertising for thirty years is of the opinion that advertising should vary cross-culturally. She uses Hofstede’s (1991) and Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) 5-D Model – where the five dimensions are power distance, individualism/ collectivism, masculinity/ femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation – and Hall’s (1976) terms: low-/ high-context cultures to explain the influence of culture on advertising and consumer behaviour and to compare advertising in different countries. Mueller (2007), Shakir (1995), and Paré, Boivineau, Pelletier, Normandin and Roy (1972) are other researchers who agreed that advertising should be customised to appeal to local tastes.

3. Message Standardisation

The copies of the print ads analysed in this section show that the managers of some American, Korean or Anglo-Dutch corporations encourage or allow advertising standardisation. *Full standardisation* is practised at times for luxury consumer products (e.g. watches and fragrances), high-technology and industrial products because they are not steeped in the cultural heritage of a particular country.

Most fully standardised advertisements printed in Romanian magazines promote perfumes. For instance, the advert for the fragrance *elle* by Yves Saint Laurent published in December 2007 in the Romanian and the British editions of *Cosmopolitan*, which reads “elle. the new fragrance/ Yves Saint Laurent/ www.ysl-elle.com”, is not translated into Romanian.

Like other ads for perfumes, from a structural viewpoint it has not a body copy and it can be included in the category of ‘image advertising’. The only piece of information the reader receives is the brand name, the product name and the website of the producing company.

The British or the American versions of the ads for American (*Gillette*, *Quick Step*, *Maybelline*, *Clinique*) and Korean (*Samsung*) brands are literally translated into Romanian. In a) and b), the act of promising is performed both by the foreign copywriter and by the Romanian translator. The performative verb is explicit neither in the American/ British copies nor in the Romanian one, promises being indicated by the auxiliary ‘will’ (cf. Pârlog 1995:147; Gieszinger 2001:235), which predicts a future event and includes the modal component of willingness to do something (cf. Quirk et al. 1985:228-229). The message of the advert for *Maybelline* c) is also almost one hundred percent standardised. The British and the Romanian advertisers realise the speech act of advising in order to educate the consumer. The only difference between the target text and the source text is that the strength of the imperative sentences in Romanian is softened, because the translator uses the polite form of imperatives, in the plural.

- a) With one simple touch of a button, he’ll enjoy the world’s best shave and you’ll enjoy the world’s best man. (in *the Am. ad*)
Cu simpla atingere a unui buton el se **va** bucura de cel mai fin bărbierit de la Gillette, iar tu de cel mai bun bărbat. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Gillette, M3Power**
- b) You’ll see, a Quick•Step® floor guarantees a lifetime of delight. (in v.1 and v. 2) (in *the Br. ad*)
Vă **veti** convinge: pardoselile Quick•Step® sunt o plăcere pentru întreaga viață. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Quick Step**
- c) Plump up your lips... [...] **Discontinue** use if you experience excessive discomfort. **Do not use** on chapped, damaged or sensitive lips. (in *the Br. ad*)
Dați volum buzelor... [...] În cazul în care simțiți o senzație excesivă de disconfort **întrerupeți** folosirea produsului. **Nu aplicați** pe buze crăpate, uscate sau sensibile. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Maybelline, Volume XL**

‘So’, a conjunction of the enhancement type, sub-types causal-conditional, general, occurs initially in the sentence in the British copy of the ad for *Samsung* d) to signal that the sentence that it introduces expresses the result of an action. The Romanian equivalent of ‘so’ is used by the Romanian copywriter of this ad which is translated literally from BE. Nonetheless, sometimes grammatical cohesive devices are not employed in the Romanian translated version of the ad, even if the ad text is rendered word-for-word into Romanian. In e), the product value is better highlighted by the British copywriter because s/he uses the conjunction ‘yet’. The textual explicitness of the source text is higher than that of the target text in which the adversative relationship between the sentence “Atât de delicat [...]” and “Tenul tău devine perfect [...]” is not indicated.

- d) Advanced Ultrathin Insulation Technology allows for thinner walls and the same great cooling performance. **So** you get over 100 extra litres of storage [...]. (in *the Br. ad*)
Tehnologia de izolare avansată oferă o performanță de răcire excelentă, păstrând o grosime redusă a ușilor și pereților frigiderului. **Astfel**, beneficiați de 100 l de stocare în plus [...]. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Samsung, G-series refrigerator**
- e) New Perfectly Real™ Makeup. Feels like nothing at all. **Yet** creates skin’s most perfected, natural look. (in *the Br. ad*)
Noul Perfectly Real™ Makeup. Atât de delicat că nici nu-l simți. Tenul tău devine perfect, mai natural ca niciodată. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Clinique, Perfectly Real**

The prints for *Dove* (e.g. f)) reveal that, compared to the American or Korean corporations, *Unilever* (an Anglo-Dutch multinational consumer goods company) accepts only *partial standardisation*. *Dove*, *Essential Care* and *Dove*, *Intense Care* are promoted in two different ads in the British magazines but in one ad in the Romanian press. The British

and the Romanian illustrations and copies of these ads are not identical, but the benefits of the hair care products are highlighted both in the British and in the Romanian adverts.

As we can see in the examples below, lexical cohesion is achieved through the use of antonyms both by the British and the Romanian copywriter. The role of the antonymic pairs written in italics and bold or underlined is to indicate that the advertised product positively affects the buyer's health.

- f) We all enjoy expressing ourselves through our hair. But the things our hair goes through every day, can *weaken* it, [...] New Dove Essential Care, helps strengthen it again, [...] (in *the Br. ad*) **Dove, Essential Care**
 We all enjoy expressing ourselves through our hair. But sometimes this can leave hair severely ***damaged*** [...] with a lot of split ends. [...] New Dove Intense Care acts deep inside and repairs very dry, [...] (in *the Br. ad*) **Dove, Intense Care**
 (Dar și micile [...] – only in v. 2) Micile gesturi de zi cu zi (uscatul, periatul, expunerea la soare etc.) *slăbesc* rezistența părului. [...] Noua gamă Dove Essential Care hidratează și revigorează părul ușor deteriorat. (in *the Ro. ad*) **v. 1, Dove, Essential Care & Intense Care and v. 2, Dove, Intense Care & Essential Care**

4. Message Adaptation

There are many 'shades' of adaptation which depend on the 'position' that the print ad has on the scale with standardisation at one end, and customisation/ specialisation at the opposite end. For this section, I have selected advertisements whose verbal-graphic part, or whose verbal-graphic and visual part are tailored to the consumer's culture/ lifestyle (i.e. to his/ her values, experiences, behaviour, beliefs).

The examples g)-k) reflect that the British, American or Australian advertisers adapt the ads for consumers who live in a low-context culture, who tend to use explicit communication and are often direct. Compared to the Romanian copywriters of these ads, the foreign copywriters use verbs in the imperative mood (see the verbs in italics and bold) more often to incite the readers to action. Advertisements in high-context cultures (such as the Romanian culture) have a less direct rhetorical style and may convey an ambiguous message.

The elliptical sentences in the Romanian ads for *Accessorize* g), *The Body Shop* h) – two British brands, and *Sony* i) – a Japanese brand, are ambiguous because one can supply either a verb in the indicative mood or a verb in the imperative mood (see the underlined words in square brackets). These sentences may have either the illocutionary force of a piece of information or the illocutionary force of a request. In the Romanian ad for *L'Oréal* k), the requests in the foreign ads are replaced with a question and a piece of information, and in the one for *Lancôme* j), the request in the Australian ad is replaced with descriptions. Another cultural aspect that influences ads adaptation is revealed in the 'contact information' part of the Romanian prints for *Accessorize* g) and *The Body Shop* h). The Romanian translator mentions only the names of the cities and the shopping centres where the product can be found, because few Romanians will buy products online.

- g) **Buy** online accessorize.com Home delivery 0870 412 9000 (in *the Br. ad*)
 [Produsul se găsește la]/ [Cumpără produsul din/ de la] București Mall / Centrul Comercial Iași / Polus Center Cluj [...] (in *the Ro. ad*) **Accessorize**
 h) Three natural ways to shop In-store, online and party at home – ***find out*** more at thebodyshop.com (in *the Br. ad*)
 [Produsul se găsește la]/ [Cumpără produsul din..., de la] București: Unirea Shopping Center • București Mall • Plaza Romania [...] Timișoara: Iulius Mall Constanța: City Park Mall (in *the Ro. ad*) **The Body Shop, All That Sparkles**
 i) **Capture** smiles automatically (in v.1) / **Capture** more with a 28 mm lens (in v.2) (in *the Br. ad*)
 [Acesta este]/ [Descoperă] Cyber-shot cu tehnologia Smile Shutter (in *the Ro. ad*) **Sony, Cyber-shot W170**

- j) **Control** the look of your lashes – from subtle to sexy! (in *the Aus. ad*)
Hypnôse. *Controlează* volumul genelor dumneavoastră: [...] *intensifică* aspectul și *amplifică* vraja genelor [...]. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Lancôme, Hypnôse, mascara**
- k) **Discover** our 1st hair care programme for dry hair, enriched with Royal Jelly... [...] **Nourish** and **replenish** dry hair [...] (in v. 1) (in *the Br. ad*)
Now **give** your hair the royal treatment: [...] Nourishes hair [...] (in *the Am. ad*)
"Lăptișorul de matcă? Pentru părul uscat, *este* o premieră*!" Penélope Cruz [...]
Prima îngrijire cu Lăptișor de Matcă**. (in *the Ro. ad*) **L'Oréal, Elvive (UK) & Elsève (RO) Re-Nutrition & Vive Pro Hydra Gloss (USA)**

The ads for *Nivea* l), like the previous ones – g), h), j), k) – and the following ones – m) and the ads for *Rimmel* –, prove that multinational companies headquartered in Europe customise their advertising campaigns. If we compare the ads for *Nivea* l) with the adverts for *Gillette* a) and *Quick Step* b), we observe that the Romanian ad for the well-known German brand l) is adapted to the Romanian market. The Romanian translator does not perform the act of promising, but the acts of informing and describing. The Romanian ad text is product-oriented rather than customer-oriented.

- l) You'**ll** not only feel gorgeous, you'**ll** look gorgeous too. (in *the Br. ad*)
Nivea Deo Pearl & Beauty primul deodorant pentru frumusețea ta Pune în valoare frumusețea pielii tale. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Nivea, Pearl Beauty**

The British ad text for *Vauxhall, Tigra*, the Australian copy for *Holden, Tigra* and the Romanian text for *Opel, Tigra* m) – the well-known German brand – were produced with three different target audiences in mind. The copies of these adverts have the function of elucidating the iconic message that is adapted to the culture of the British/ the Australian/ the Romanian consumer. The Australian copywriter uses the imperative "Go hunting" to imply that, if the reader buys the car, she can seduce any man. The picture of the ad shows three men's heads hung on the wall like the heads of trophy-hunted animals. She is also encouraged to release her "wild side". A similar message is conveyed to the British reader, who is told that she can become independent if she buys the new car with only two seats and is advised to "use them wisely", i.e. to offer the left seat to a gentleman. Both the Australian and the British copywriters address a young independent woman, who fights for her personal success and who does not like being dominated by men (Australia and the United Kingdom score high on masculinity and individualism). The Romanian text is adapted to the Romanian cultural values. The woman in the ad image is not ego-oriented. Unlike the Australian woman, she is not pictured alone in the car, but next to a man, and she is not the driver of the car. The text reinforces the visual: "Fericire²" ("Happiness²") refers to the fact that happiness is raised to the power of 2, i.e. to the fact that the car will make both the woman and the man in the picture happy. Unlike the British copywriter, the Romanian translator does not use explicit words that refer to the intimate relationship between a woman and a man. S/he compares indirectly the power of the car with the power of the blue pill, but the sentence "Se eliberează fără prescripție medicală." ("No prescription is needed.") lacks the subject, so that no reader is offended. The Romanian copy, which contains no imperative, addresses a reader who belongs to a rather collectivistic culture (cf. Neculăesei and Tătărușanu 2008:201) and to a high-context culture that prefers implicit information.

- m) One in five men don't remember the name of the first girl they slept with [...] (in v. 1) / One in four men think foreplay is a golfing term [...] (in v. 2) New Tigra. Two seats. **Use** them wisely. [...] For a brochure **text** "Tigra" [...] or **visit** www.vauxhall.co.uk/tigra (in v. 1 and v. 2) (in *the Br. ad*)
New Holden Tigra. **Go hunting**. [...], **visit** your Holden Dealer for a Tigra test drive, and **release** your wild side. (in *the Aus. ad*)

Este albastră. Te stimulează. Se eliberează fără prescripție medicală. [...] Noul Opel Tigră TwinTop. Ferice² [...] Noi vă *construim* mașina. (in *the Ro. ad*) **Vauxhall (UK) & Holden (AUS) & Opel (RO), Tigră**

Other ads that are adapted to the psychological profile of the consumer are the ones created for *Rimmel*. For instance, the British advertiser of *Rimmel, Extreme Definition* borrows and transforms the well-known Roman proverb “Divide et impera” (Divide and rule) to address a woman who appreciates independency and power. The headline of the British advert reads “Divide and conquer”, whereas the Romanian headline reads “[Aplicatorul] Definește și separă” (“[The comb applicator] Defines and separates”). The message conveyed by the Romanian translator is centred on the product and the positive effects it has. In the British ad for *Rimmel, Xtreme Volume*, the copywriter uses the syntagms “massive lashes”, “Break the rules” and “Get noticed” to encourage the British woman to purchase the mascara. The collocation “Break the rules” is also employed in the British adverts for *Rimmel, Full Volume* (2004 and 2005) and the sentence “Big is beautiful.” is inserted in the body copies of these ads because the advertiser knows that the consumer appreciates originality and is ready to accept a new standard of beauty so that she will be noticed.

Two of the reasons why the syntagms/ sentences in the British adverts were not literally translated into Romanian are that Romania has a ‘feminine’ culture – Romanians do not value competitiveness, assertiveness or ambition like the British people do, and it is a predominantly collectivist country (i.e. identity is based on the group to which one belongs). “Gene masive” (i.e. “massive lashes”) is not used in the Romanian ad text first because it is an unacceptable collocation, and second because the copywriter does not need to satisfy the customer’s need to feel powerful. The collocate “massive” is replaced by “Xtreme” (“gene Xtreme”), an adjective that is incorporated into the name of the product and that has the equivalent “extreme” in Romanian.

The Romanian prospective buyer is not encouraged to ‘break the rules’, to be different from other women, but like other women. She is informed that the mascara *Rimmel, Xtreme Volume*, the lipstick and the lip colour *Rimmel, Full Volume* are trendy in London (“The London look”). If the sentence “Big is beautiful” were translated literally into Romanian, it would sound unnatural, because Romanians have a different perception of beauty. “Big is beautiful” is rendered into Romanian by “Se poartă buzele senzuale” (“Sensual lips are trendy”).

5. Conclusion

Corporate culture is a key factor in standardising or customising advertisements. This article has illustrated that the degree of standardisation of the advertising message is higher if the prints advertise American or Korean brands, and that the European or the Japanese multinational companies encourage copywriters to embed the target consumer culture in the verbal and non-verbal part of the advert. The adapted ads in my corpus have shown that the British, the American and the Australian advertising styles differ from the Romanian advertising style. The British advertising style is roughly similar to the American and the Australian ones because the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia share many cultural characteristics.

As we have seen, masculine cultures, which are characterised by ego needs, prefer to associate the product with ‘success’, whereas feminine cultures like to associate it with ‘beauty’ and ‘attractiveness’. Advertising in individualistic countries is task-oriented, and it is more verbally oriented if the consumer lives in a country with a low-context culture. On the contrary, copywriters of the print ads in high-context cultures sometimes use indirect speech acts in the body copies of the advertisements.

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