TRANSLATION OF PUN IN ADS

According to my experience, I think the most difficult part to handle in the translation of advertisement discourse should be pun from English to Chinese.

It is a rhetorical method which contains two sometimes even more meanings.

Firstly, the most ideal way to deal with it is to translate pun (in original language) into pun (in target language). It would be the best practice to do it. But, in fact, not every English pun has equivalence or counterpart in Chinese. So it would be impossible to practice the idealized step but have to move to another choice.

Sometimes, we have to make a little change first. Then I’d like to give an example to introduce the methods when dealing with pun translation.

There is an example for a beer brand called Guinness. In its commercial, it says “We’ve poured throughout her reign.” Here “we” means the Guinness Company, while “her” means “Queen’s”. “Pour” means “fill one’s cup with drink, such as beer”. Then we could get the meaning for the whole sentence, that the Guinness Company (We) have already served beer for as long as the Queen has been on the throne.

At the same time, another question arise, the consumer might mistake the word “reign” into its homophone “rain” due to the word “pour” proceeds here. To avoid this kind of misunderstanding, the better practice is to re-write the sentence into “We’ve poured beer throughout
her reign.”

So eventually, for the best understanding for Chinese consumers, the ad translator will have to choose the major meaning to convey that can be well received by Chinese. And she or he may invent a rhetorical expression in Chinese. I think the translation could be: “新齐士啤酒”

Then I’d like to give some specific steps could be used in pun translation.

The first one is finding the counterpart of the pun.

It is generally believed that a pun constitutes barrier to translatability by its sound, form, meaning and other means. Finding a counterpart of the pun in the target language which fit in both forms and meanings as the original one have been always considered the highest level of translation of advertising pun.

For example:

Source: Easier dusting by a stre-e-e-etch!

Target 拉拉拉拉长,除尘力超强。

The second one is translating the pun separately, specifically speaking; it refers to adopting alternative practices, separating the semantic of the pun then spill it into two layers to express.

Here are several examples:

Source: The Unique Spirit of Canada.

Target 别具风味的加拿大烈酒,独特的加拿大精神.
The third one I’d like to talk about is the loan translation of pun; some of the advertising pun generates on the base of a certain cultural background above. And the spread of English language and European and American cultures within Chinese language have built a bridge between the bilingual translations. Here loan translation means applying the inherent modes of the English language which have deposited in Chinese language, then translating the English advertisements.

Here are some examples:

Source: I’m More satisfied.

Target 莫尔香烟,我最满意.

The fourth one is called partial focus translation. Sometimes it would be difficult to express unique and elaborate pun in translation, so the meaning have to been sacrificed, especially when some ads contain multiple sets of puns or multiple implications within one pun, translators have no choice but apply the technique of partial focus to maintain the conceptual and essential meaning.

Here are some examples listed below:

Source: We take no pride in prejudice.

Target 对于您的偏见,我们没有傲慢

Source: Great Party Ahead.

Target 盛大聚会,近在眼前。

Source: The driver is much safer when the road is dry;
The road is much safer when the driver is dry.

Target: 路面干燥,司机更安全;司机清醒,道路更安全。

Source: Butllin’s –it is the right choice.

Target:布鲁特林公司——您的正确之选。

Most of the pun in ads could be translated by the means of partial focus applying, however, sometimes after the first layer of meaning of the pun be translated, another layer of meaning is also very important, but cannot be translated simultaneously. At this time, some methods can be used to make up for some compensation, which mainly refer to the media carrying the advertisements, such as images of the television, sounds of radio broadcasting, and the layout of newspapers.