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Advertising translation and pragmatics

Cristina Valdés

Introduction

If pragmatics is the study of language use and is concerned with “the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effect of our choice on others” (Crystal, 1987: 120), it is undoubtedly a key discipline to approach both translation research and translation practice for various reasons. Most particularly, in this chapter I describe how advertising translation is one of the areas of application of pragmatics research and how it benefits from pragmatics both in research and in professional practice.

According to Hickey (1998), pragmatics is concerned with the relations between languages and their users. Moreover, Cook (2003: 51) defined pragmatics as

the discipline which studies the knowledge and procedures which enable people to understand each other’s words. Its main concern is not the literal meaning, but what speakers intend to do with their words and what it is which makes this intention clear.

The context of utterance, or the context of language use, the general principles of communication or the goals of the speaker are some of these factors. Therefore, it is not only the semantic dimension of meaning which is the main focus of interest, but also the elements related to language use that are dependent on the speaker, the addressee and other features of the context of utterance, such as intentionality, presupposition, inferencing, deixis, speech acts, implicature, conversational features, or the meaning relations between different portions of discourse. Therefore any analysis of translation, as we deal with different contexts of use, with the mediation of the translator within the communicative process and with utterances in a different language, would necessarily require some insights to the main theoretical frameworks included in pragmatics.

In this introductory section I present some of the changes that translation studies have undergone under the influence of, or in relation to, pragmatics. The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed a profound change in the way translation had been traditionally conceived and this was partly due to developments within linguistics and to the growing awareness of the complexity of translation.
Within the sphere of linguistics and translation, the traditional distinctions between Nida’s formal and dynamic equivalence, or Newmark’s semantic or communicative equivalence were replaced by other taxonomies of equivalence, more inclusive of factors such as text or participants, and directly deriving from the influence of text linguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics. Likewise, going back to the late 1970s, the first studies about the translation of advertisements had a functional and contrastive linguistic focus. Tatilon (1978) claimed that the study of the translation of advertising should be based on its language, as it is the empirical object of study, and hence the scholar’s task should involve the description of the correspondence between the formal structures of the source language and those of the target language. Adopting as a starting point the primary function of advertising, persuasion, he concluded that the language of advertising should be clear and adequately verbalised and should be appealing enough so as to raise the interest of the receptor and to make it memorable. Consequently, the translator should decipher the source text, or texte de départ, and most particularly puns, and transcode it in order to produce a target text, or texte d’arrivée, in a target context. Tatilon’s concept of equivalence could be aligned with Nida’s or Mounin’s postulates, and with some of the notions developed in the so-called School of Leipzig in the 1980s. However, most of these approaches founded their analyses on a partial and restrictive concept of equivalence, highly limited to contrastive comparative accounts.

An innovative contribution in translation research under the influence of pragmatics was made by Wilss (1982) who, in The Science of Translation, introduced clear advances in translation theory by endorsing a concept of textual and pragmatic equivalence. Wilss claims that any translation theory should consider extratextual, or extralinguistic, factors such as the text function, the role played by the translator and the specific role of the reader in the translation communication process. As regards advertising, this textual and pragmatic equivalence is cardinal, since a more prominent value is given to the decisions the translator is making along the translation process and to the participants in the process, taking into account the function of the target text: to promote a product and to persuade the target receiver to consume it.

Pragmatics had a strong impact on translation approaches since it moved away from viewing translation as a purely linguistic operation based on semantics to conceive it as a communicative process that is located in a particular context at a certain period of time. Therefore, translation is viewed as an activity taking place between utterances and texts and actual uses of language, and these are produced by participants in a communication process or act. Accordingly, pragmatics, together with text linguistics, highlights the role of participants in communicative processes, and hence in translation, places emphasis on the function of text and increases awareness of the importance of source and target contexts.

From this perspective, the text is no longer an isolated unit, but is apprehended as a text-in-situation, playing a specific role in both the source and the target context. This approach led to studies in translation scholarship that shifted from prescriptive approaches to translation, to a focus on the choice of texts to be translated, on the way they are translated in their context of use and on how and why they are produced and received, particularly functionalist, communicative and polysystem approaches. The text type taxonomies from the 1970s absorbed some pragmatic principles such as the assignment of a particular action to a text type and served as selection parameters to establish translation methods (Reiss, 1981, 1976/1989; Reiss & Vermeer, 1984; Snell-Hornby, 1988). Thus, an advertisement would demand a translation method whose main goal is to achieve action by persuasive means, so the specific function of the translation process and of the target text entails a more dynamic conception of equivalence.
Translation functionalist theories, which assign a translation mode to a text type according to its text function, derive from a conception of text linked to Text Linguistics and Communication Theory. Back in the 1980s, de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) integrated text in a communicative occurrence or communicative framework, which is required to produce a text, and thus to translate it. It was Bell (1991) who adapted Hymes’ notion of communicative competence to translation and defined it as “[t]he knowledge and ability possessed by the translator which permits him/her to create communicative acts – discourse – which are not only (and not necessarily) grammatical but . . . socially appropriate” (1991: 42).

Likewise, the pragmatic function of advertising material compels a description of the different participants in the communicative process of production and translation of these texts. Pragmatics brings attention to the contextualisation of translation processes and to the nature of translation, shifting from a conception of translation as mere linguistic encoding, decoding, recoding and decoding processes to a notion of translation as a complex communicative act in which several agents and factors intervene. One of these elements is the initiator of the translation process, which Vermeer (1989) called “commissioner” and Zabalbeascoa (1992) “client”. In advertising translation, the role of the client obviously plays a significant role, since they make the decisions about the marketing and communication plan, which include the selection of content and material, and determine the function of the translation in the market or the target audience to which the campaign is addressed. This first participant in the communication process remains during the whole process as the marketing expert who also provides an opinion about the final product, that is, the communication plan, in which translated material is inserted. However, there is another participant in the translation process, the translator, as a language and culture expert, who takes decisions about language and textual choice so that the intended effect of the marketing plan is obtained. On the other end of the communication cline, in a classical representation of a semiotic communicative process, according to Shannon and Weaver (1962), we locate the receptors of the translated utterances or strings of texts, which, in the case of advertising translation, can be real ones or potentially target consumers. Nevertheless, the translator has in mind a subset of target consumers, which have already been carefully defined by the audience-design or market-segmentation experts after conducting extensive research.

As far as the process is concerned, most translation scholars agree on the principle of functional equivalence in advertising translation, that is, the translation of advertisements should produce on the receptor of the target text the same effect the source text had on the source audience, being aware that there may be some textual changes and even some functional variations. For example, different translation strategies may apply in order to achieve the intended effect.

Nord (1997: 47) also distinguished two basic translation types: “documentary translation”, more oriented towards the source context, and “instrumental translation”, a translation process that entails the creation of a new text in the target language so that it functions as an instrument of communication between the source text producer and the target audience, acting the elements of the source text as a reference model. This instrumental translation presents a pragmatic view of translation, as Nord indicates, “readers are not supposed to be aware they are reading a translation at all” (Nord, 1997: 48), which implies that the translator has introduced the necessary changes to adapt the text to the target norms and conventions so that the target receiver believes it is an original text produced in the target culture. Smith and Klein-Bralley (1997: 175) confirm the application of this concept to advertising translation: “These texts can be assessed as authentic texts of language X in their own right. They may have started life as translations, but they have to
sell their products as original advertisements.” Therefore, target texts perform a particular social role in the target context of use as if it were a textual product of this target context, so its nature as a translation remains invisible.

Thus, it seems clear that the functions of advertisements fully determine the translation process and language is used to invite action, as Cook (1992/2001) claims, to attract interest and attention, so the component to be preserved in translation is the pragmatic function of the text.

In an integrated approach to translation studies, Snell-Hornby (1988) postulated an approach that integrated language, culture and the social function of translations in the target context, attempting to develop a model of study of translation based on text analysis and communication studies, and distinguished three functional text dimensions in order to better study translations (1988: 114):

1) the function of intra-textual coherence, which makes reference to the coherence between intratextual elements;
2) the functional interaction, established between the sender and the receptor of the text during the reading process, understanding reading in a broad sense to include both visual and oral perception.
3) the function of the text in a concrete target context.

The cultural turn (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990) that brought to the forefront the importance of contextual factors, of ideology and of language users and receptors stimulated new lines of enquiry in language and translation studies. Snell-Hornby (2006: 4) highlights “two essential turns within the discipline that took place during the 1990s”: a methodical one, which involved calling for more empirical studies, and a “great turn” derived from outside the discipline, mainly from globalisation and rapid advances in technology. Obviously, the globalisation of markets exerted a strong influence on international communication and advertising, bringing about a tendency towards a homogenisation of products and messages at an international level.

The so-called “cultural turn” in linguistics and translation studies meant a more intense activity around research on translation as communication, leading to a more flexible and interdisciplinary approach to advertising translation, with studies focusing on issues like the complex semiotic nature of advertisements or the impact of the product on the translation of advertisements.

These new perspectives demand a multidisciplinary approach, which enables translation scholars to understand the different forms of persuasion in advertising in a world characterised by the global-local pressures. Communication, culture, text, language and users have become the key issues to consider.

In the following section, I explore the impact of the multimodal nature of advertisements on the interpretive use of translation and how this relates to translation studies and practice.

1 Multimodality in advertising: a challenge to pragmatics

Advertisements do not belong to a static text type, nor they fulfil a single function, even though the most prominent is the persuasive one. Their complexity partly derives from their multimodal nature, given the internal variety of components, with great potential to create meaning and with an intense aesthetic and emotional potential. The overall persuasive effect is conditioned by the combination and the interplay of textual elements as well, so that
Whether the advertisement is printed, audiovisual, or oral, its internal structure decisively influences the final target text. Since translation is a decision-making process, the textual selection and arrangement of elements in the target text largely depend on factors such as the restriction of the medium, cultural elements or the principle of relevance, among others.

The different elements of the discourse of advertising are responsible for the final effect of the communication and translation process: the text and the context in which this is produced and received, paying due attention to the following components, according to Cook (1992/2001): music pictures, words, paralanguage, intertext, co-text, participants, media and context. The target reader’s effort is invested in the retrieval of the overall meaning of the advertisement, which often implies processing an implication, a subtle hint, or a cultural nuance. The translator’s role, hence, is regulated by Levý’s Minimax Principle (1967), so that the translator chooses an option which “promises a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort” (1967: 1179), which is particularly interesting in the case of advertisements, since they are characterised by their brevity and, at the same time, by their impact.

Given the number and variety of elements and components involved, special attention will be paid to audiovisual advertisements and multimedia promotional texts, which belong to the “multi-medial text type” (Reiss, 1981: 125) for their combination of elements belonging to different semiotic codes and for their transmission through the media. As regards audiovisual advertisements, they combine pictures, sounds and words in both oral and written realisations and in a variety of forms: they can be made up of songs, music, dubbed voices, subtitles, typography, photographs, cartoons, etc. The verbal component appears in combination with other modes of communication, and the study of how the multiple combinations of all the different elements and participants contribute to shaping the advertisement’s meaning has been regarded as “the discourse of advertising” (Cook, 1992/2001: 1). Colour, size, position, music, movement or light intensity influence the way an advertisement is perceived. Receivers tend to make associations from the interplay of all these features, allowing for a more global interpretation of the text. All these elements which are combined in an advertisement are culture-specific, since cultures assign different interpretations to them out of convention. It is therefore necessary to understand how language and pictures work together in advertisements in specific situations. Kress and van Leuween’s three principles of composition (1996/2006: 177) are invaluable to understand “the representational and interactive meanings of the image to each other”: information value, salience and framing. These authors claim that these principles that relate to visual texts are also applicable to composite texts or multimodal texts.

As far as scholarship is concerned, on the whole, there has been a gradual shift from purely linguistic or verbal-based models towards studies focusing on the intersemiotic and multimodal nature of advertising texts (Freitas, 2004 or Valdés, 2005) and on the cultural dimension of advertising translation (Valdés Rodriguez, 1997 or Guidère, 2001). Some translation scholars have already paid attention to these issues, mainly focusing on the intersemiotic nature of advertisements and its effect on translation and integrating Kress and van Leeuwen’s approach: Slater (1988), Torresi (2008) and Smith (2008) commented on the role of images in translated printed texts and on the importance of visual elements in advertising translation. Likewise, in the monograph on Key Debates on Advertising Translation, edited by Adab and Valdés (2004), there are several contributions on the semiotic interplay of advertisements and its impact on translation: taking Jakobson’s concept of intersemiotic translation, Freitas (2004) undertook a detailed analysis of three Portuguese campaigns of different sectors, highlighting the viewer of ads as the final construer of meaning and at intersemiotic translation as a way of achieving maximum equivalence, and Millán-Varela (2004) explored the semiotic nature of printed
advertisements of an ice-cream brand in different markets, placing emphasis on the cultural and ideological role. Munday (2004) suggests incorporating concepts from visual communication and semiotics into the study of advertising translation. In 2005, Cruz García and Adams published a paper on the relationship between the verbal and iconic components and its implication for translation, and Valdés (2005) described the role paid by the oral component in advertising, particularly focusing on the significance of songs. All these studies revolve around the interplay of the different components of printed ads, billboards or television commercial, and introduce descriptions of the effects on the audience, which may not necessarily coincide with the target defined at the marketing campaign.

Regarding audiovisual texts, Chaume (2001) refers to them as “multidimensional texts” since there are several codes of meaning, which use two different channels of communication at the same time and in the same space. Therefore, the coherence of the whole audiovisual text depends on the cohesion mechanisms between verbal and visual elements and requires physical support to communicate the semiotic complexity of an audiovisual advertising text. This complexity of a television advertisement mainly lies in the two components below, an acoustic and a visual one which, subsequently, are divided into two subcomponents: verbal and non-verbal (Valdés, 2007; Valdés & Fuentes, 2008; Chaume, 2013).

Based on de Beaugrande’s standards of textuality, which apply “to all texts that possess communicative value” (Bell, 1991: 163), cohesion and coherence are two main defining characteristics of texts. Cohesion is the property by which clauses or the components of a text hold together, while coherence consists, according to Bell (1991: 165), “of the configuration and sequencing of the concepts and relations of the textual world which underlie and are realised by the surface text”. They both provide meaning to a text, the former by binding the surface elements of the text and the latter by connecting the text with the conceptual world. But these relations are established by viewers of the text in a given context of utterance. Thus, in communicative situations, “coherence requires that the grammatical and/or lexical relationships involve underlying conceptual relations and not only continuity of forms. Coherence relations exist between co-communicants in a context of utterance” (Hatim & Mason, 1997: 214). In general terms, coherence refers to the relationship established between the elements that constitute a text as well as to the relationship between the text and the world it relates to.

The combination of image and sound is conditioned by the persuasive goal and the type of design of the advertisement influences the way the text is perceived, so the receptor acquires an active role, as s/he assigns a particular meaning to the different elements of the commercial by associating them with other aspects that are culturally internalised. The text is understood as a text-in-context and hence the interpretation will be different from one context to another. When the advertising text is translated for an international target through global media and into different languages simultaneously, the interpretative process may be highly complicated, since audiences are heterogeneous groups, anonymous and belonging to different cultures, particularly in global or international campaigns. What is desirable on the part of advertisers and translators, in order to make their advert effective, is to achieve a coherent text so that it is considered acceptable by the target audience (Valdés, 2000; Janoschka, 2004, Valdés & Fuentes, 2008). Nevertheless, it often seems difficult since the translation agency seldom has access to the multimodal textual elements of the source text. As Mason observes in relation to the notion of coherence, this is “a condition of users, not a property of texts” (2001: 23), so we can claim that coherence is always built by the audience. Thus, coherence requires much more than internal text cohesion since textual coherence stems from the inference and interpretation processes of viewers. A revealing example of the complexity that the translation of audiovisual commercials entails is the Fiat Croma television campaign.
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(2006) starring the British actor Jeremy Irons. The tagline of the campaign, “Un grande viaggio”, defines the messaging in both the dubbed and the subtitled versions, where the values of softness, smoothness, style and elegance are accordingly associated to the car and to the celebrity, Jeremy Irons: the music reproduces a smooth version of the well-known song “Over the rainbow”, placing emphasis on slow travel to a location over the rainbow. Jeremy Iron’s original voice in the subtitled version reinforces the deep and elegant features of his voice, while these are partially lost in the dubbed commercial, efforts to employ a similar voice have been made; his movements and gestures on screen doubly refer to the stylish and soft movements of the car and of the actor. The idea of a “grande viaggio” is clearly created by the interplay of all the visual and oral elements. Therefore, the intended pragmatic effect derives from the particular way meaning is created by the target audience, whose appreciation of the adequacy of the different textual manifestations, whether dubbed or subtitled, determines their perception of the text. Moreover, the different viewers of the television advertisement obtain a different impression of the text, and the reading of the multimodal text is largely built upon the sum total of the possible previous experiences of viewers about the car, the celebrity and the song.

Another form of multimodality can be found in the rapidly-increasing multilingual promotional texts on the internet. The different textual components make up a multimedia non-linear text, which allows users to select among different options for information, by means of clicking salient features in the form of hyperlinks (Janoschka, 2004; Valdés, 2008). Consequently, audiences have a more active role in using promotional material on the Internet, although people rarely read promotional web pages or printed ads word by word, but rather they tend to scan the page. Visual elements and devices such as highlighting words, employing powerful pictures or embedding engaging promotional videos contribute to generating interest in the text. Translators become localisers, professionals with expertise in the discourse of promotion, in the discourse of the Internet, in the way Internet viewers should be addressed, and, in particular, in the specific challenges of website translation procedures.

2 Reception studies, Relevance Theory and speech acts in advertising translation

The multimodal nature of advertisements, that is, the combination of different modes of expression, also affects the level of compliance with the acceptability principle; in other words, to produce a text that will be considered “acceptable” by the target text receptors. According to Neubert and Shreve (1992: 74),

>a<ceptability and intentionality are components of textuality, and they are orienting principles for translation. [ . . . ] For texts to be accepted as they were intended (or, at least, as intentional), they must be negotiated. This negotiation implies an agreement to cooperate in communication.

These two translation scholars relate this notion of acceptability to Grice’s co-operative principle since

[t]exts are invitations to communicate and must be presented to listeners and readers in ways which secure their cooperation and comprehension. Acceptability is a precondition for cooperation, and the presumption of cooperation is a rationale for adhering to acceptability standards.

(1992: 75)
The translator is ideally familiar with the target culture conventions for a particular text type, namely advertisements, not only as regards the verbal component but also the non-verbal elements and produces his/her text according to these conventions. Similarly, there are some preconceived ideas the potential consumers of promotional material have which influenced the reception of advertisements. Once they identify that the target text is an advertisement, they relate it to the expectations they have about this type of text. They also bring their expectations to the text as regards the degree of knowledge they possess about the promoted product and brand, and about the sort of ads for that brand they are used to seeing.

Indeed, early models related to reception and communication (Iser, 1978; Hall, 1980; Corner, 1991; Goldman, 1992) pose interesting questions about how reading processes determine the relationship between the text and the situation of use. On the one hand, an interaction between the intratextual elements is produced, as well as between a text and the other texts belonging to the textual canon at stake, which is referred to as intertextuality, and, on the other hand, an interaction takes place between the text and the contextual reality. Corner (1991: 271–272) referred to three levels of meaning that audiences may bring to texts: denotation, connotation and preferred reading, which complements Eco’s notion of “aberrant decoding” (1965), which may be due to cultural misunderstanding, for instance.

Consumers are often faced with the need to decode and comprehend advertisements that include some unfamiliar or shocking elements, which demand an extra processing effort, a higher degree of cooperation, which may sometimes involve a reaction of strangeness, and therefore a concrete positioning for or against the consumption of the product, as happens with the well-known provocative Benetton campaigns in the 1990s or some contemporary sexist campaigns. It is worth pointing out that advertising exploits elements such as silence or powerful pictures to trigger shock reactions in order to boost an advertisement’s strength of appeal. Several studies have paid attention to the psychological dimension in decoding advertisements (Williamson, 1984) and from the perspective of advertising practitioners. For instance, Brierley (1995) in The Advertising Handbook specifically described the principles and techniques of persuasion and their effectiveness and de Mooij (2004) explored the persuasive role of the elements of advertising in the sales process.

Of course, reactions to a given text may not be homogeneous, and this is something advertising copywriters and designers are well aware of, especially when the advertisements are part of an international campaign, with a diverse and fragmented target, who use different languages and share different cultural frameworks. Experts in cross-cultural marketing research are aware of this and highlight the fact that, in the case of advertising, translation as language transfer is not enough; they employ the concept of localisation, particularly in reference to web translation (Declercq, 2011; Singh, 2012) or communication adaptation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010: 596). Marketing scholars such as de Mooij (2010) acknowledge that “[i]n the translation process, values can become incomprehensible or get a different loading” (2010: 136).

In this scenario, translators perform a double function: first, to make the right decision, or at least an optimal one, about the verbal component so that the target text, produced in a target language, manages to convey the message associated with the promoted product or brand. Second, as translators are not only language experts, but are also qualified in the target culture, they manifest their competence during the decision-making process about which elements in the text are relevant or irrelevant for the target audience. Consequently, we can claim that advertising translators do much more than replace words and much more than convey meaning: they make efforts to trigger the same effect and create the same impact on receivers. In recent times, the concept of transcreation has been introduced, particularly in professional
contexts related to marketing translation activities. This notion foregrounds the creative dimension of translation and the orientation to the target culture, involving “re-creating the content for a specific market” (Brown-Hoekstra, 2014: 38). In a very interesting study, Pedersen (2014: 67) establishes the parallel between advertising translation and transcreation:

In general, transcreation and advertising translation share common grounds above all in the field of application, as both concepts evolve around persuading the client. Consequently, there is a shared need to emphasize cultural adaptation, local market specificities, etc. The importance of the brand and how it is presented in each target market is also recognized both in advertising translation and transcreation.

According to Hickey (1998: 81), the translator intervenes “to distract the attention of the target reader away from the author’s point and towards issues that could potentially be marginal”. This assertion runs parallel to the notion of translation as the manipulation of the source text to produce a target text, as the so-called Manipulation School alleged back in 1985 (Hermans, 1985) as regards literary translation. In the particular case of advertisements, Rabadán (1994) claims that they are an example of obligatory manipulation, since their function is “to convince potential buyers to consume the product” and “if expectations are different in each target context, then the translator should choose between to either manipulate language and textual form in order to preserve text function and thus persuade and bring the attention of customers” (1994: 131). Therefore, manipulation is not negative in the case of advertising, but is necessary to preserve the pragmatic function of the text. Consequently, when translating, equivalence becomes synonym of effect, that is, any process of translating advertising is conditioned by the effect and impact translators intend to trigger on receivers.

To this approach to manipulation and translation, Relevance Theory adds the notion of context of an utterance as “a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world; more especially it is the set of premises used in interpreting that utterance” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995: 15), which places emphasis on the role of hearers, on their previous knowledge of the world and on the subset of knowledge that is useful to interpret the utterance or text. Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995: 260) state that “[h]uman cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance” so that a communicator, by requiring the listener’s attention, indicates that what is said is relevant to the hearer’s interest.

In 1991 Gutt introduced the application of Relevance Theory to translation, pointing out that “the bilingual agent can have an influence even on the objective of the communication act (1991/2000: 67) and later on, in 1998, he claimed that this theory “can help to better understand the nature of translation and some of the problems it typically involves” (in Hickey, 1998: 41). When referring to Relevance Theory, Hatim (2009: 208) defines relevance as the “tendency to achieve maximum benefit at minimum processing cost”. Within this paradigm of translation, language always has an interpretive use, since utterances in translation are “intended to represent someone else’s thought or utterance” (Hatim, 2009: 208), so that translation is an instance of “interlingual interpretive use” (Gutt, 1991/2000: 136). It is of interest to read Heltai’s (2008) evaluation of Gutt’s application of Relevance Theory to translation, inviting further research. In the field of advertising, Relevance Theory has been generally applied to the interpretation of media texts, particularly in Tanaka (1994) and other authors (e.g. Dynel, 2008), but only a few studies have been published about the influence of Relevance Theory on advertising translation research (Xu & Zhou, 2013; Yang, 2016) so far, although interest in this field is reflected in doctoral theses in academia.
Before the 1990s some perspectives emerged in language and linguistics that shed light on language in use and language as action. One of this was Austin’s seminal work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) where, as the title indicates, emphasis was placed not only upon words, but also on the speaker’s intention when making an utterance and on its effects on the audience, i.e., on the social or speech acts that result from using language. Austin (1962) distinguishes three kinds of acts when a sentence is uttered: a locutionary act, which presupposes that an utterance provides sense and reference, an illocutionary act, by which an utterance makes requests, promises or offers, asks questions, etc. depending on an intention or force, and a perlocutionary act, which, by uttering a sentence, presupposes particular intended or unintended effects on the receiver/audience. John Searle (1969) confirmed the importance of this concept by stating that “speaking a language is performing acts according to rules” (1969: 36–37).

In the case of advertising, utterances are generally used to perform the action of persuasion and to enact an effect of consumption, which is the main function of advertising. Thus, when utterances are translated, the target text needs to preserve the source text’s macro speech act. In an interesting analysis of gender and politeness in advertisements, Vázquez Hermosilla (2012: 8) points out that “[t]he macro-speech act of advertising discourse is mainly formed by a series of assertive speech acts whose illocution, i.e. intention, is to move H to buy a product”. Likewise, an interesting study about speech acts and advertising by Simon and Dejica-Cartis (2015) include Austin and Searle’s approach to speech acts, complementing it with van Dijk’s (1977/1992) notion of macro/global-speech acts on the assumption that advertisements are macro-speech acts related to global speech acts, dealing with a multinational audience, which means that the languages involved need to be adjusted to the several target cultures. Simon and Delica-Cartis analysed a corpus of 84 printed advertisements of different kinds of products and described the speech acts contained in them. Concerning advertising translation, Trosborg (1997: 14) explains that:

In translating, the aim is not necessarily matching speech act for speech act. The reader’s (client or consumer, etc.) interest must be constantly matched against the communicative intent of the producer of the source text. For example, if the intention of the producer of the ST is to sell a product, any translation of the text as an advertisement must be evaluated in terms of how well it serves the purpose (i.e. the persuasive text act involved), rather than on the basis of a narrow linguistic comparison. If, on the other hand, a translation of advertising copy is required purely for information, the translator’s product will be adjusted accordingly.

Since translators make decisions about how to translate advertising messages exploiting the opportunities offered by their multimodal nature and transforming the source text according to the target audience and context and to the product or brand, some of these transformations may involve a shift of focus in the speech acts contained in the advertisement. The question that arises is whether speech acts in the source text are preserved or not in the target text(s).

The following example shows an advertisement that has been translated with a number of assertive speech acts that replace the directive expressions of the source text. In a 2006 campaign for Nokia N91 mobile phone, whose main innovation was based on the XpressMusic facility to listen to music with the Nokia device, the slogan was kept in English, “I am my music”, but the way the receiver was approached differed in, for example, the English printed ad and the Spanish one. In the English source text, the use of imperative forms both in the main text and in the tagline invite the potential buyer to use the new device to make
phone calls and to enjoy music, with a higher number of directive speech acts than in the Spanish target text in which the slogan and the brand headline are preserved untranslated. There is a slight change of focus, consisting of an appeal to the reader based on the use of assertive speech acts. However, the second-person form of the verb “poder” (can) and an imperative form (“disfruta”) still retain a similar macro-speech act.

The Nokia N91 holds up to 3000* songs. Switch easily between calls and your favourite tracks with Hi-Fi sound quality. It’s music at the heart of the Nokia N91. Make it yours.

Nokia Nseries.

See new. Hear new. Feel new.

National Geographic, international, July 2006

Nokia N91. Tu multimedia computer para almacenar hasta 3000 canciones* con sonido Hi-Fi. Gracias a su tecnología 3G, Wi-Fi y Bluetooth podrás descargar y transferir con facilidad la música que más te guste. Disfruta de su calidad de imagen y sonido con “En Directo. Las Ventas 1 de julio de 2003” de Hombres G.

Nokia Nseries.

See new. Hear new. Feel new.

National Geographic, Spanish edition, July 2006

Indeed, the Spanish advertisement addresses this target user by directing attention towards the brand name as a salient element at the beginning, employing a second person possessive (“tu”) and verb form (“podrás”) to involve the target client in the message. Moreover, the Spanish translator has localised the text, adapting the content to the target contextual features. Nokia’s campaign comprises supporting music shows and concerts in Spain at the time the product is launched; as the advertisement indicates, Nokia was promoting a CD with a remake of a concert of a popular Spanish band, Hombres G, by including the tracks in the N91. Therefore, the translator adapted the text to the context of use of the advertisement and introduced a strategy of proximity, bringing the target client closer to the product and exerting a powerful persuasive effect on them.

Furthermore, advertising texts of a certain product seem to bear similar text production and translation strategies, which are often related to the notion of stereotyping or prejudices associated with a specific culture. It is well-known that some products are narrowly linked to particular cultural backgrounds, and this influences the choice of language in the international promotional campaign (Kelly-Holmes, 2005; de Mooij, 2010; Valdés, 2016; Nederstigt & Hilberink-Schulpen, 2017), the lack of translation, or the total or partial transfer of elements. Certain advertising categories, both in printed and in audiovisual format, seem to assign an added value to their products by not translating them. Their underlying philosophy seems to be that this contributes to make a stronger and more glamorous image of the advertised product. This is especially the case of perfumes (which are almost always “parfums” and make an extensive and intensive use of French) and fashion clothing. If the strategy is non-translation, the audience (unless proficient in the language) misses the meaning of the verbal content of the message. The illocutionary value of the utterance, i.e., the speaker’s intention in producing that utterance, might come through, but doubt exists about whether the perlocutionary effect is equally achieved. It could be argued that the product determines the choice of the translation strategy, so audiences hold assumptions about the
use of a particular language in association with a brand or product type. For instance, Martini advertisements employ Italian language and are untranslated, to reinforce the bonds between the brand and the stereotyped Italian way of life, which international audiences presuppose. Slogans like “Beve la vita baby”, “La riviera di vita, baby. Passa la notte in bianco, baby” or “Bikini di vita, baby. La vita é un cinema, baby. Ooh la la vita, baby, beve la vita, baby” implicitly invite viewers to enjoy drinks, friends, love, nights, beach, La Riviera, cinema, all different elements associated with a stereotypical Italian way of life. This translation strategy, which actually involves lack of translation, is thus conditioned by the presuppositions that audiences maintain about products, their value or their characteristics.

Another stereotype which derives from the cultural presupposition related to the type of product, shared by audiences, can be found in some advertising campaigns for German cars. Even though textual material is translated into the target language, there is a brand tagline, part of the company’s trademark, that is left in German as a communicative cue that indicates quality. The receiver is automatically reminded about the association between German-ness and technological innovation and reliability. Thus, advertisers and translators opt for leaving a sign of this value for the reader to make the expected inference. For example, Audi advertisements included the slogan “Vorsprung durch Technik”, which adds an alliterative value to the text, and which in certain campaigns has been translated into Spanish as “A la vanguardia de la técnica”. In this latter case, the semantic meaning is preserved, but the appellative value and the pragmatic meaning are lost.

Both activities, translation and advertising, are characterised by being teleological activities, which means that decisions are taken with a particular objective and potential target segment in mind. Since the aim is to sell a product or promote a service, emphasis is always given to the persuasive effect the text should have. The selection and the presentation of the various elements both of the source and of the target text depend on how attractive and convincing the advertisement is for its receivers. Thus, the receiver is the main factor influencing the production and the translation of the ad. All decisions depend on the presupposition the translator has about the target consumer’s interpretation of the message. However, it is not always easy to communicate the intended message of international promotional texts, as they are characterised as having a heterogeneous, anonymous and geographically dispersed mass audience.

As mentioned above, the viewers’ reaction to an advertisement is never passive but active, since they construct meaning from the interaction between their sets of values, beliefs and expectations and the complex internal structure of the text. Advertising audiences are no longer regarded as passive victims of the roles society has imposed on them, but as active groups of interpreters. Therefore, meaning is produced through the interaction of texts and audiences, rather than within the texts themselves. “The meanings are affected by what texts and audiences bring to them” (Brierley, 1995: 204). Therefore, it is important not to underestimate the importance of reception studies in translation, in particular in advertising translation, since they focus on the way viewers perceive, understand and interpret advertisements as sound-image-text complexes and on the sociocultural changes which affect their reception. Studies on the reception of advertisements, which include the study of language and texts in use and how they are received, contribute to a better understanding of advertising translation, particularly focusing on its role in target contexts.

There are as many interpretations of a text as audiences, since they respond to texts in different often unpredictable ways, and the same applies to translation. The translator, as the producer of the target text, can only propose one possibility among many others, which must be meaningful to the target readers in a particular context, and the text is given a meaning
only at the moment of reception. In the case of advertising, the multiple possibilities of encountering different target texts may give rise to different versions of the same target text depending on the medium employed: a version for television with sound and moving image and another version for printed magazines can be both transmitted and received at the same time. To mention some examples, most cosmetic or fashion brands are promoting their products in different media, such as printed magazines, catalogues, television channels or the Web. Therefore, the potential afforded by the multimodal composition of advertisements determines the reception of the advertising text, and thus the pragmatic operations at stake when target receivers build up the meaning of the advertising text, namely inference, implicature or presupposition.

Inference is often preferred as one of the strategies in advertising in order to deduce an indirect meaning from the associations made between the elements of the text and the extratextual and previous knowledge of the target receiver. Silveira and colleagues (2014: 542) have recently studied inferences in advertisements using Relevance Theory and they conclude that “communication is not achieved by encoding and decoding messages, but by providing contextual clues to build the desired inference about the intentions of the communicator”. According to Yus Ramos (2010: 24), “the inference is a mental operation by which the participants in a conversation assess the intentions of the others and on which they base their answers”.

An example of inferential meaning in an advertisement is both the English and Spanish slogans, “To all those who use our competitors’ products: Happy Father’s Day” and “A todos los que usan los productos de nuestros competidores: Feliz Día del Padre”, by Durex (2009), where receptors understand on a surface level that those who use products from other brands different from Durex are congratulated on Father’s Day. If that is so, on an interpretive level, they also infer that if they are looking for a product to avoid becoming a father, Durex is the right choice. This illustrates how pragmatic meaning goes beyond the semantic level of words, to the interpretation of implicated meaning of utterances in their context.

In the following example, inference is also required to construct meaning from translated texts, most particularly to disambiguate the double meaning of puns and to infer meaning from intertextual references: in a marketing campaign of Ceramide Night (1996), branded by Elizabeth Arden, the product is advertised in different languages for international markets claiming to repair the skin during the night, so that the skin is kept young. Both the verbal and the non-verbal components allude to the traditional fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, where a princess sleeps for 100 years without ageing. To fully comprehend the communicative clues which are present in the advertisements, previous knowledge is required to make the right connections between the fairy tale and the properties of the night cream. The French and the Italian printed advertisements played on the words that made reference to the fairy tale character to produce the same pragmatic effect on potential consumers: in the slogans “La beauté en dormant” and “La belleza dormendo”, the terms “Belle” and “Bella” in the fairy tale’s name were replaced with “beauté” and “belleza” so as to reinforce the result of using the Ceramide Night cream, that is, to remain beautiful (Valdés, 2004). Therefore, the target audience faces the task of moving beyond the semantic level to reach the pragmatic one.

A common strategy in promotional messages is based on the use of implied meaning, where marketing campaigns, often addressed at young segments in international or global campaigns, comprise powerful taglines accompanied with appealing pictures and, in audio-visual videos, catchy tunes. The pragmatic effect is very intense and usually pivots on the use of implied meanings, which can only be adequately retrieved at the communicative act in which the utterance takes place. As Hatim claims,
[t]hough not exclusively, implied meanings can be located in the paradigmatic axis of the communicative act, on the level of interaction best captured by the familiar stylistic principle of dealing with “what is said” against a backdrop of “what could have been said but wasn’t” (Enkvist 1973).

(2009: 206)

According to Grice (1975), interlocutors say something but mean something more: what is implied, the “implicature”, conveys extra meaning to what is actually said. In the case of translation, untranslated advertising texts frequently rely on the capacity of global target audiences to comprehend the overall meaning of the marketing messaging in English and the implied meaning, which stems from the interplay between all the elements of the multimodal text. The 212 VIP Carolina Herrera perfume advertisement (2011) revolves around a slogan which is left untranslated in English: “Are you on the list?” and the visual elements that are associated with the brand Carolina Herrera, namely private parties in the city of New York and its cosmopolitan culture. Hence, the question in the slogan invites the potential consumer of the perfume to make a choice, since it is suggesting that if you use this perfume, you will become a VIP, so, as a very important person, you will be on the list, and therefore you will be allowed in parties and other events. When reproducing messages like this in a target language, the translator’s intervention may be necessary to navigate a balancing act between what should be explicitly said and what could have been said but is not, with the ultimate aim to secure adequate pragmatic equivalent effect. In Wang’s terms (2007: 35), “the translator needs to recover meaning conveyed through implicatures, and represent the full meaning in the translated work”.

Presupposition about previous knowledge conditions the way translations are made, given that many advertisements contain a high degree of presupposed content, which sometimes pose challenges to translators, who have to decide on what is relevant or not to the target audience. According to Austin (1962), messages are constructed by means of communicative acts performed through the oral or written use of language and, within these, Austin distinguished among locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary levels, that is, an utterance has sense, force and effect. Pragmatics-oriented views of translation (Hickey, 1998; Gutt, 1991/2000) claim that focus should be placed on reperforming locutionary and illocutionary acts, so that the perlocutionary effect is achieved in the target text. This is of particular interest in advertising translation, since there may be a complex decision-making process in order to achieve the pragmatic effect, as we have been discussing.

There are intended meanings in advertising texts which may be inferred by the audience, as they are unexpressed explicitly in the text. One of the Martini ads starring George Clooney is a good example of the elliptical style which characterises many television advertising spots: little is said and assumptions lie at the basis of its overall meaning. The amount of information that needs to be said is conditioned by the assumptions users make about the words uttered by George Clooney and the actress on screen. She simply exclaims and asks: “George! No Martini? No party”. The three propositions are syntactically simple and they do not contain verbs to manifest action. However, the underlying propositional message seems to be sufficient to trigger the following meaning: “Even if you are George Clooney, if you do not bring Martini, you are not invited to any party”. Then, in the second part of the advertisement, Clooney knocks at the door again carrying a bottle of Martini in his hand and standing next to several boxes of that beverage. However, the audience is surprised at the woman’s reaction, since she simply takes the bottle and leaves Clooney outside. Therefore, the second and final proposition reinforces the quality and preference for the product, Martini, over George
Clooney. Obviously, for this meaning to be inferred, the audience needs to be familiar with this actor, besides interpreting the few words uttered in the film in the light of its visual dimension. In Bell’s words (1991: 165) “Coherence consists of the configuration and sequencing of the concepts and relations of the textual world which underlie and are realized by the surface text.” Consequently, when translating this commercial, special consideration is given to the locutionary and illocutionary acts, so that the target text readers manage to retrieve the same effect, that is, to perform the same perlocutionary force. Likewise, viewers are required to reproduce this set of inferencing and conversational implicatures between the characters in the spot to successfully understand the overall meaning, in combination with their presupposed knowledge.

When internationalising local products and culture-bound elements are part of the content of the marketing campaign, the translation task requires extra effort. Valdés (2016) describes how the translator opts for adapting the content of a promotional campaign of a local cheese on its website, localising the sections into English and intentionally reducing content, omitting historical details when the translator considers data too specific or irrelevant for the English-speaking users, who may have access to the website from different international locations, and prioritising the principle of relevance over the historical importance of the events which are mentioned. This reduction or deletion strategy results from the application of the principle of relevance by translators when detailed historical or technical accounts are present in advertising texts, but maintaining the illocutionary intention designed in the marketing campaign and the persuasive perlocutionary effect intended in the target texts. Localising advertisements to target markets is characterised by the ultimate aim at achieving the effect which has been already defined and duly scheduled in the communication plan.

Concluding remarks

In reviewing the common history of translation studies and pragmatics, one conclusion points to the need for further research on how pragmatic concepts contribute to the study of translation processes and products. For instance, the multimodal nature of advertisements and how their receptors, translators or target-text audiences create meaning from utterances in this type of text are of key interest in order to explore the complexity of the internal nature of advertisements and how this complexity entails difficulties in the translation process and in the reception of translations.

The concepts of relevance and speech acts contribute to a better understanding of how source-language texts are translated to target languages and cultures, although still further research is required in the area of advertising translation. As we have seen, there are isolated contributions which pay attention to individual case studies or aspects but lack a comprehensive approach to all the subtleties and particularities of advertising communication and translation.

Similarly, reception studies allow account to be taken of the role of receptors in reading advertisements, of different textual configurations, resulting from the interplay of all the diverse textual elements, and for the actual meaning advertisements are given from the inferences and presuppositions receivers add and from the context-in-use norms or features. However, there are few studies on the reception of advertising translation, as there are in other subject areas like literary translation and reception studies or audiovisual translation and reception (Brems & Ramos Pinto, 2013; Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018).

Apart from research, pragmatics is a discipline that is also indispensable in translation training programmes. Advertising translators should be adequately trained to read advertisements and to open their eyes towards the effect which is carefully articulated in the communication plan for the product that is promoted. The textual component urges translators to learn
to understand a complex and multimodal text with the aim to produce a rich and potentially persuasive advertisement so as to trigger the same effect on target readers or users. Training programmes and further research on advertising translation may focus on thorough knowledge of how pragmatics helps explain how texts are constructed by means of speech acts, with different meaning levels, and how audiences build up meaning and are persuaded to perform an action. Of particular significance is the field on advertising/promotional translation for online media, where much is still to be explored. This would contribute to improving quality in this area of interest of translation studies, from both methodological and theoretical points of view.

**Recommended reading**


**References**


