The semiotic role of translation in advertising. The case of the bilingual advertisement from a comparative aspect.

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ABSTRACT
Although much has been written on translation in recent decades, very few titles have been concerned with non-verbal factors in (verbal) translation, let alone non-verbal translation as such. The scope of this presentation is the study of the semiotic role of translation in advertising, especially in bilingual advertisements the advertisements in which the linguistic message is written in two languages, in our case in English and Greek. At this point we must clarify that the advertisement that we will examine is a Greek advertisement, in which it’s very interesting to see the semiotic dimension of the linguistic message’s English translation. The advertisement studied is the ‘product’ of a cooperation between the Greek department store attica and the Greek airline company Aegean Airlines.

KEYWORDS
Semiotics, bilingual advertisement, interlingual translation, intersemiotic translation, non-verbal communication

1. The relationship between semiotics and translation

Semiotics considers translation as a sociocultural phenomenon. Translation activity in culture cannot take place in isolation from experience of culture and the technological environment. According to Nida (1998), the most pervasive and crucial contribution to understanding the translation process is to be found in sociosemiotics because it deals with all types of signs and codes, especially with language as the most comprehensive and complex of all systems of signs employed by humans. Other scholars in semiotics have developed new concepts. Thus, Gorlée (2004:103-104) talks about semiotranslation, a growing
network which should not be pictured as a single line emanating from a source text toward a designated target text. Sütiste and Torop (2007:196) talk about *translation semiotics*, a discipline that, as part of semiotics, engages in comparative analysis of sign systems and functional relations between different sign systems and, as an autonomous discipline, provides the means to distinguish and discern the degree of sign system translatability. The possibility of methodological synthesis between all the above characteristics is the principal concern of our study.

2. Why this advertisement?

Translating advertisements draws attention to various aspects of intercultural difference. The advertisement under scrutiny is the second part of the campaign of the cooperation mentioned above¹. In the previous part of the campaign the translation was also provided. It is therefore very interesting to see why the advertisers insist on the use of bilingual advertising (categorization according to Bertin, 2002:191), that is, the translation of the Greek linguistic message. However, there are three semiotic differences between the two parts of the same campaign: a) In the first part of the campaign the Greek linguistic message of the advertisement was on the left part and the English on the right; b) The previous advertisement took up only one page. This advertisement extends to
two pages, which give an impression of proximity and of meaningfulness; c) In the previous advertisement the iconic message consisted of figures, while in this advertisement the figures are replaced by items.

3. The interlingual translation of the advertising message

According to Jakobson (1971:262), the interlingual translation, or translation proper, involves two equivalent messages in two different codes. For Van Kesteren (1976:48), we deal with a typology of equivalent relationships between a source text and a target text that has to be established. This equivalence is inspired by the wish or need to increase communicational efficiency by deliberately modifying a verbal sign in order to make it fit an alternative linguistic code. In our research case, does interlingual translation increase the communicational efficiency of the advertisement? And if it does, in which way?

The first semiotic observation in the advertisement under scrutiny deals with the language which appears first. In the first part of the campaign the Greek linguistic message of the advertisement was on the left part and the English on the right. Since it is a Greek advertisement, it was obvious that the source language is Greek and the target language is English. In the second part of the campaign this isn’t very clear because the English text is on the left part and the Greek on the right, giving the impression that the source language is English!
3.1. The translation of the advertisement’s slogan

The first statement which must be made here about the translation of the slogan of the particular advertisement (Example 1), is the English verb “can” which is translated into Greek as θα έρθετε ‘will come’. The aforementioned verb cancels the connotation of option, of the personal decision implied in English. Moreover, the verb ‘fly’ is translated into Greek as πετώντας ‘flying’. The verb maintains the connotation of flight, especially of an airplane flight but is translated in Greek as a participle and not as an English infinitive. The use of this particular participle connotes in Greek simultaneous action, which for these advertisers is ‘shopping’.

Τώρα θα έρθετε στο attica πετώντας ... δωρεάν με την Aegean! (message in Greek)

‘Now you will come to attica flying ... for free with Aegean’

Now you can fly to attica ... for free with Aegean! (message in English)

Example 1: The translation of the advertisement’s slogan

As a second remark, we observe that in the slogan of the first campaign the verb ‘fly’ in the English text and the verb πετάχτειτε ‘fly’ in the Greek was accompanied by quotation marks, which are missing in the advertisement under
study. The explanation in the first case was that the quotation marks empowered
the connotation of the airplane flight, something that is seen as necessary in the
advertisement. In the Greek and the English slogan we don’t have the utterance
‘Aegean’, the name of the airline company, an utterance that exists in the
advertisement under scrutiny. Bonney and Wilson (1990:192) insist that in
advertisements it is usually the connotation rather than the denotation of a
signification which is important.

3.2. The translation of the advertisement’s principal message

The first remark we make when we glance at the translation of the
principal message is that there isn’t a quantitative equivalence\(^2\) between the
source language and the target language (Example 2). The English version
contains 35 words and the Greek one 45 words. The addition of γιαηί τώρα
‘because now’ in the Greek part of the principal message connotes a new store,
thus a modern store, another option for shopping that didn’t exist in the past. The
translation of the adjective ελληνικό ‘Greek’ to a noun in English (Greece’s)
makes the principal message stronger in English because it connotes that the
department store is the largest in the country (connotation of a geographical code).
This does not emphasize the ownership of the store, as is the case with the use of
the adjective in the Greek (connotation of the origin).
Example 2: The translation of the advertisement’s principal message

Furthermore, the translation of the Greek verb να γνωρίσετε ‘to know’ using the verb ‘to check out’ is a second conscious effort to empower the English principal message. The Greek verb connotes acquaintance, while the English verb connotes control. It must also be noted that the Greek principal message begins with an explanatory code (γιατί τώρα ‘because now’), but its English counterpart with a topological code (‘attica’) that is also set in bold.

3.3. The translation of the advertisement’s explanatory part

The main point in the translation of this part of the linguistic message (Example 3) is the use of parenthesis for lexical elements that are not in
parenthesis in the source text. This is the case in για τις πτήσεις εσωτερικού, which becomes *domestic*, σε οικονομική θέση, which becomes *in economy class*, and σε *business class*, which becomes *in business class* even though in the Greek text the business class is written in English characters. Another observation has to do with the quasi quantitative equivalence in the two versions of the explanatory part. The Greek part contains 55 elements (words, numbers and symbols) and the English 50 elements.

Η προσφορά ισχύει με αγορές από 1.770 € για ένα εισιτήριο με επιστροφή σε οικονομική θέση ή από 2.000 € σε business class για τις πτήσεις εσωτερικού, και με αγορές από 2.400 € για ένα εισιτήριο με επιστροφή σε οικονομική θέση ή από 3.200 € σε business class για τις πτήσεις από την Κύπρο (Λάρνακα).

The offer is for one round trip ticket (domestic), valid with purchases more than 1.770 € (in economy class), or 2.000 € (in business class), or one round trip ticket from Cyprus (Larnaka), valid with purchases of more than 2.400 € (in economy class) or 3.200 € (in business class).

*Example 3: The translation of the advertisement’s explanatory message*

*3.4. The translation of the advertisement’s informative part*

The final part of the interlingual translation process has to do with the translation of the advertisement’s informative part, which provides information on
how to get into contact with the department store and about its location (Example 4). The Greek message Πληροφορίες στο: 211 1802600  ‘information at: 211 1802600’ is translated in English ‘For more information call 211 180260’. Even though in the last decades the Greek informative messages have been more polite, using ‘Για περισσότερες πληροφορίες’, the advertisers consider that advertising for oneself provides the basic information, whereas the English message prefers ‘For more information call 211 180260’.

Πληροφορίες στο: 211 1802600, «attica, the department store, Πανεπιστημίου 9, Σύνταγμα»
(message in Greek)

For more information call 211 1802600, «attica, the department store, 9 Panepistimiou (El. Venizelou) Str., Syntagma Sq., Athens» (message in English)

**Example 4: The translation of the advertisement’s informative part**

The two messages differ in two points: the English one adds the immediate exhortation ‘call’, which is not very common in Greek advertising because it is considered as connoting immediacy or as an order. On the other hand, the Greek connotation adds a verbal sign, namely the preposition στο ‘at’, and a non verbal sign, namely a colon ‘:’. This is intersemiotic translation, a non verbal sign that
was missing in the previous campaign. In the previous campaign the exhortation ‘call’ was also missing. The rest of the informative message does not present any other differentiation, except for the fact that the English message is more analytical, explaining that Panepistimiou Street is also known as El. Venizelou, that syntagma is a square and the department store is situated in Athens. This last explanation constitutes an addition in order to pinpoint that the department store is situated only in Athens so that consumers are not confused by the reference to Cyprus in the principal message and in the explanatory part of the advertisement.

4. The intersemiotic translation of the advertising message

Intersemiotic translation, the interpretation of a verbal sign (in our case the linguistic message) by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (in our case with an image), is the most important type of translation in advertising since the image is perhaps the more ‘powerful’ semiotic system. As Jakobson (1971:357) mentioned, the iconic and indexical constituents of verbal symbols have often remained underestimated or even disregarded. For Gorlée (1994:166), intersemiotic translation is the most tentative and fragmentary of the three kinds of translation named by Jakobson. Since this transmutation presupposes that the source language is a verbal language, our study will take as a source language the
bilingual verbal message of the advertisement and as a target language the iconic message of the advertisement. What is remarkable in our study is the fact that intersemiotic translation is a translation process which is characterized by a duality. There are two language sources with equivalent messages, Greek and English, and there are two kinds of transmutation, one including two pictures, a suitcase and an attica shopping-bag, and the other including two logos, attica’s logo and the Aegean Airlines logo.

More analytically, the two principal advertising messages, “fly and shop”, are translated interlinguistically and intersemiotically. The verbs πετώντας ‘flying ’fly’ and the utterances ‘αεροπορικό εισιτήριο/round trip ticket’, ‘Aegean Airlines’, ‘αφίξεις/arrivals’, ‘economy class/οικονομική θέση’ and ‘business class’ are translated iconically by a suitcase and by the attica shopping bag respectively. But we have to mention that some of these verbal signs are translated by irrefutable iconic signs only because they are part of the some advertising connotation (attica and Aegean Airlines), since some of them may have other connotations. So, we can say that ‘round trip ticket’, ‘αφίξεις/arrivals’, ‘economy class/οικονομική θέση’ and ‘business class’ can also refer to a train trip, a boat trip or a bus trip, and we know that they refer to a flight trip through the intersemiotic translation, looking at the linguistic message and seeing the Aegean Airlines logo. However, this kind of intersemiotic translation isn’t a one-way
translation, as Jakobson considered it to be (1992:145), since the understanding of the message concerning the suitcase needs to take into consideration the logo.

The same isn’t necessary for the intersemiotic translation of the shopping bag since the logo of the department store is on the shopping bag. Thus, the one-way translation, verbal sign to non verbal sign, is adequate, since the shopping bag accomplishes the translation of the utterances ‘department store/πολυκατάστημα’, ‘fashion/μόδα’, ‘purchases/αγορές’, ‘opening hours/ωράριο λειτουργίας’, without making it necessary to refer to the department store’s logo. At this point we have to mention that academics succeeding Jakobson insist that intersemiotic translation isn’t only the result of the translation of a verbal language to a non verbal one, but is also the reverse and, in addition, the translation of a non verbal language using another non verbal language.

Coloration is a system of internal codification that concerns the use of colors. It is a way of reading based on a network of dense and selective significations (Guidere, 2000:33). In our case, it is clear that there is symbolism of colors that allows especially for the linguistic message ‘attica’ to be connoted through the system of colors. As such, we can see that the background color of the linguistic message is connoted in the color of the suitcase and in the color of the shopping bag. Similarly, the color used for the print of the linguistic message is connoted in
the background color of the iconic message, in the color of the suitcase and that of the shopping bag.

5. Concluding remarks

In the words of Gumpertz (1996:365), code switching can be defined as ‘alternation among different speech varieties within the same event’. In our case, the same event is the same content in two languages. Although English is generally used in international advertising for purposes that are not directly linked to country-of-origin competence (Piller, 2001:64), the language may in some cases be employed in order to exploit the cultural competence of Britain or USA or any other English speaking country.

In our case, the use of English connotes a west-European modus vivendi encompassing style, traveling and shopping. We must not forget that commercial translations have sought to create foreign markets for transnational corporations by taking advantage of language hegemonies in advertising campaigns (Venuti, 1998:467). Especially in Greece, the use of English in the transmitted message aims to convey to the Greek consumer illusions of glamour and grandeur, thus enticing him to adopt a whole life style that is foreign to his traditions and culture (Pagona, 1997:145).
The translation process in the advertisement includes translation of verbal signs, of non verbal signs (punctuation, color), but also phenomena such as hyperbole that are often observed in advertising discourse. Since there is no perfect equivalence in the advertising message at the level of interlingual and intersemiotic translation, a common phenomenon in the translation of advertisement texts (Tatilon, 1990:245), Eco’s conclusion that translation can never say the same thing, but it can say almost the same thing, seems to correspond to this observation. However, translating means controlling all the means of expression of a text in the target environment, verbal and non verbal alike (Stecconi, 2004:22).

We therefore conclude our study with the following remarks:

a) Intersemiotic translation is considered less ambiguous when the advertisers use items instead of figures. Figures have sociological characteristics which restrain the consumer’s freedom.

b) Total quantitative equivalence seems to be necessary in the translation of the advertisement’s slogan, which is the most powerful part of the advertisement, but unnecessary for the rest of the linguistic message.

c) The sign system of chromatics is very important for the preservation of the aesthetic equivalence of the advertisement.

d) The fact that the linguistic message occupies only ¼ of the
advertisement connotes that for the advertisers the intersemiotic translation is more important than the interlingual translation.

e) The hyperbole presented in the interlingual translation contrasts with the simplicity of the rest of the advertisement. Thus, there is equivalence concerning hyperbole in the interlingual translation, but not in the intersemiotic translation.

f) The role of interlingual translation seems to be complementary to other semiotic systems and not the most influential.

From the above remarks, we can conclude that the role of interlingual translation seems to be complementary to other semiotic systems, and not the most influential. The power of the non-verbal sign system, especially of the image, makes interlingual translation a secondary, but necessary, factor in the transmission of an advertisement’s message. This is why advertisers can only overcome the possibility of ambiguity that sometimes accompanies non-verbal signs systems by making use of the verbal sign system. In our opinion, this combination of verbal and non-verbal signs systems redefines the influence of interlingual translation in the world of globalization, where intersemiotic translation seems to dominate and fascinate.
References


**Notes**

1. For a semiotic study of the first part of the campaign, see Kourdis (2007).

2. According to Derrida (2004:428), the quantitative equivalence in translation is an aesthetic difference that concerns the spatial and temporal forms of sensibility.