

## SKOPOS THEORY IN THE TRANSLATION OF ONLINE ADVERTISING FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to find out the type of functional equivalence adopted in the translation of online advertising from English and into Arabic. This research adopted skopos theory (Vermeer 1978) which is a functionalist theory that shifts from the linguistic equivalence to the functional appropriateness of the target text. By comparing 40 online English advertisements and their rendered version into Arabic, the results of this research revealed that skopos theory was significantly used in both textual and visual elements (e.g. images) of target advertisements. Generally, the translator adds, explains, replaces or omits source linguistic or visual elements at the expense of cultural concepts to achieve a functional equivalence. This resulted in a significant cultural loss and misrepresentation of the source culture.

**Keywords:** Skopos theory, functional equivalence, translation, culture

### 1. Introduction

Most of these past studies (e.g. Kashoob 1995; Adab 1998; Guidère 2000; Al-Shehari 2001, Al-Agha's 2006) tackled strategies of translation in advertising such as transliteration, adaptation in textual elements. However, no study has ever investigated translation of online adverts from English into Arabic; more specifically, no study has ever investigated Vermeer's Skopos theory (1978) in the transfer of both textual and visual elements in online cosmetic and fragrances adverts. There thus seems to be a great shortage of research which may inform both academia and marketing. This shortage of available studies has provided a strong motivation for conducting the current research.

### 2. Aim of the study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the frequent use of Vermeer's skopos theory (1978) in the transfer of textual elements (e.g. brand names, headlines, slogans) and visual elements (images, symbols, colors) in online advertising from English into Arabic. Through this investigation, this study also attempts to find out whether the functionalist translation theory is applicable and helpful in the transfer of both textual and visual elements of online advertising. This study, thus, endeavors to introduce tools to translators (for the Arab market) that might help them not only identify cultural elements in advertisements and analyze them, but also assess the appropriateness of one strategy rather than another in the transference of online advertising into Arabic.

### 3. Skopos theory

Skopos is the Greek word for "aim" or "purpose". It is an approach to translation which was developed in Germany in 1978 by Vermeer. This approach reflects a general shift from predominantly linguistic and rather formal translation theories to a more "functionally and socioculturally oriented concept of translation" (Baker and Saldanha

2009, 235). Skopos theory was inspired from communicative approach and action theory in translation.

Skopos was first applied in non-literary texts such as scientific, academic, instructive, touristic texts etc., where translators took into consideration the functional equivalence of the text in the target culture. This was highly supported by Vermeer (1978) who focuses on the intended purpose of the target text that determines translation methods and strategies. According to Vermeer (1978), the main objective of this functional approach "is the prospective function or skopos of the target text as determined by the initiators, i.e. client's needs. Consequently, the skopos is largely constrained by the target text user (reader/listener) and his/her situation and cultural background" (Qtd in Baker and Saldanha 2009, 236).

#### **4. Corpus**

The study was based on online adverts collected from a wide number of websites of cosmetics and fragrances. 40 online adverts in English (the source language) and their rendered version into Arabic (the target language) were randomly selected. In order to be considered a translation pair, the English and Arabic versions should advertise the same product and have the same or very similar graphics.

#### **5. Procedure**

A number of procedures were followed to investigate Vermeer's Skopos theory in the transfer of both textual and visual elements in online adverts. They are as follows:

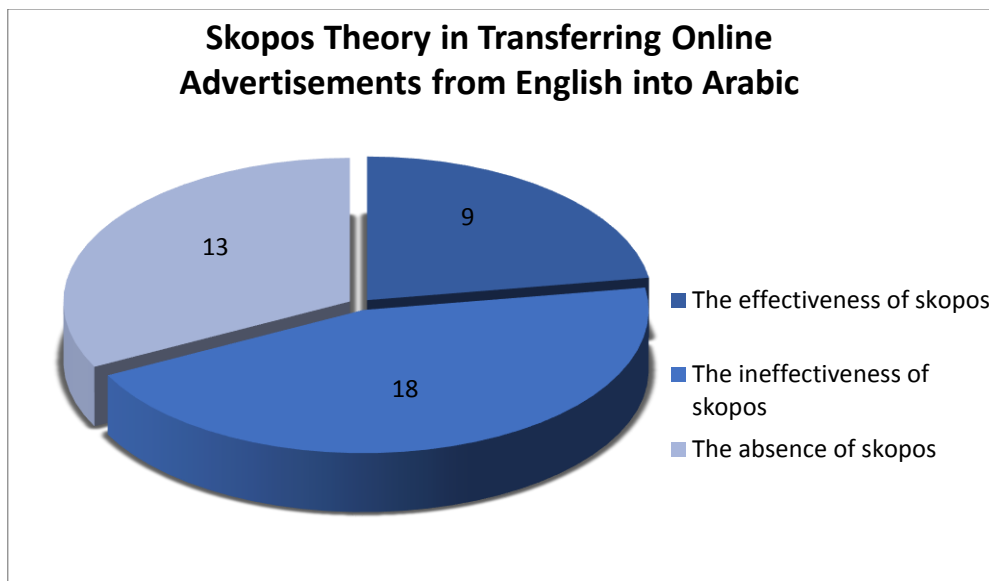
First, textual elements in the source and target adverts were observed by the author of this paper: Examples of the textual elements of advertising observed are: Brand names (e.g. *Eternity*), company/designer names (e.g. *Avon*), slogan or a headline (e.g. *you are the eternal part of me*) and short body copy such as a brief description of a cosmetic product.

Visual elements in both source and target adverts were also observed: For example, women's images, symbols, logos, colors. The purpose of observing textual and visual elements in adverts was to find out the frequent use of skopos strategies in both textual and visual elements of online adverts as well as their impacts on the cultural concepts of the target culture.

Second, the effectiveness, the ineffectiveness or the absence of skopos theory was determined in the target (Arabic) adverts. Third, the frequency of the effectiveness, the ineffectiveness or the absence of skopos in the Arabic version were counted and processed on Excel and then presented in a graph and discussed.

#### **6. Results**

The findings of this study revealed that 18 online adverts out of 40 were characterized by ineffective use of skopos theory. The latter affected the message of both textual and visual (images) elements in transferred adverts to a very large extent. The study also indicated that only 9 adverts out of 40 used effective skopos strategies. However 13 adverts did not use skopos theory at all.



**Figure 1.** Skopos Theory in Transferring Online Advertisements from English into Arabic

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 The impact of skopos theory on textual elements of online adverts

This study found that skopos theory takes place when the translator adds, explains, replaces or omits source linguistic terms to achieve a functional equivalence, but most of the time this happens at the expense of cultural concepts. To achieve a certain functional equivalence, the translator makes use of other sub-strategies such as transmutation (e.g. addition, omission, explanation, transliteration etc.) that makes the communicated message of the target advert partly understood by the target readers. For instance, transmutation can also be noticed when the translator transfers brands or slogans literally such as in the example, *declaration of independence* which has been translated into تصريح للاستقلالية. Meaning based translation is another transmutation sub-strategy through which the translator preserves the main concept of the original textual elements (a brand name, or a slogan); for instance, the brand *Express your silky beauty* has been translated into عبري عن نعومة بشرتك; only the meaning of *Silky beauty* has been transferred into نعومة بشرتك. Transmutation also happens when the translator adjusts (adds or modifies) some textual elements; for example in the target advert *Visit*, the translator has added an expression about the newness of the product العطر الجديد للنساء; this expression doesn't exist in the original advert. Additions of this type seem to constitute a recurring strategy in many advertisements translated from English. The strategy suggests that the feature of newness is thought by advertisers to have a special appeal to Arab consumers in the context of advertisements. Apart from addition, omission is another sub-strategy used to achieve a functional equivalence in both textual and visual elements. An instance of textual omission is in the advert about *Q10 Plus* anti-winkles cream; the English advert introduces the cream as follows: *Nivea Visage, Q10 Plus anti-*

*winkles system*. However, the Arabic version introduces the cream as follows: مجموعة Q10 , Q10 Plus , قللي التجاعيد خلال ساعات مع Q10 Plus. The words *Nivea* and *Visage* are omitted.

Transliteration is another functional method that is frequently employed in target textual element of adverts; this sub-strategy does not respect any particular system; its purpose is to offer a rough guide to pronunciation of the original brand names in the Arabic version. Transliteration does not maintain many of the aesthetic elements present in the original adverts such as rhyme, puns, figurative style. This is clearly indicated in the following brand names: *Visit* فيزيت; *Good-bye Cellulite* جود باي سليوليت; *Invisible for Black & White* سيلفربلاك; *Happy time* هابي تايم; *Idylle* ايديل; *Silver black* سيلفربلاك; *L'instant de Guerlain* دي جيرلان لينستانت. Transliteration does not provide the implied meanings of the brand names. For this reason, a brand should be translated, adjusted or even recreated for the target readers. If a product has a meaningful name which describes its advantages and makes the product memorable, the reader is more likely to remember the name when shopping. It is, thus, necessary to ensure that products names are understandable, meaningful for the target audience. In other words, products must be successfully harmonised with the "local realities" (Leonardi 2000, 4). They should be adjusted or reorganized so that they fit the needs, the expectations, "and the frames of reference of the target culture" (Newmark 1988, 94).

Transliteration, as a functional type of translation, is supposed to provide a guide to pronunciation of the original brand names and make them easily pronounced by the target consumers; on the contrary, the results of this study indicated that this strategy distorts the phonetic pronunciation of many source brand names; by altering the pronunciation of the brands, they become unrecognizable. For example, in the advert *L'instant de Guerlain*, the name of the French perfume house *Guerlain* [gɛʁlɛ̃] is transliterated into جيرلان; in the Arabic version, the sound [g] has been substituted by the Arabic letter/sound [ج] which has completely altered the pronunciation of Guerlain. Also the brand *Ghost* translated into جوست. The translator should have used [ك] instead of [ج]. In another example, the fragrance name *BVLGARI* [bulgəri], an Italian name, is transliterated into بولغري; the sound [g] is substituted by [غ]; it should also be replaced by [ك].

In brief, while using skopos method in transmuting the product's name, advertisers should ensure that their brand remains recognizable in the Arab world, and the product has a meaningful name for the consumers. The advantage of transmuting textual elements, mainly brands, in the Arabic adverts is that it helps consumers to focus on the effect and features of products, while the brand names in their foreign form (without any additions) focus only on the product being advertised. This is indicated in the brand name *Experience Sheer Gloss Balm by MaxFactor*, the Arabic advert, adds further emphasis on the features of the brand: ببلسم الشفاه تمتعي *Experience Sheer Gloss* بلسم كثيف بفوائد طبيعية.

## 7.2 The impact of skopos theory on visual elements of online adverts

Skopos strategies has been used on adverts' images to adjust them according to the Arab cultural and religious norms. However, skopos has highly affected the target adverts because translators tend to use it excessively in images, including its sub-strategies such as transmutation and omission. According to this study, skopos strategies take place when the translator/marketer omits visual elements such as nudity and eroticism. In other adverts, only a partial omission has been done; that is to say, only parts of the images are omitted such as the fragrance *Black Silver* by *Azzaro* where the female is omitted but the male is preserved. Another reason behind removing images,

even if they don't include eroticism, is due to localization norms; marketers/translator has become aware that introducing "foreign" women in the Arabic adverts isn't as meaningful as Arabic figures. The reason why we notice the latest commercials on TV or even on YouTube are made by Arab women, like the Egyptian actress Hind Sabri who introduces *Garnier* collection.

One can notice a mixture of both of these sub-strategies in many adverts. In the fragrance advert *Visit*, for instance, the source image implies the idea that this fragrance makes you attractive and, thus, makes you have admirers or visitors"; the advert features a beautiful woman wearing a red party/evening dress that reveals her chest, part of her breasts, her shoulders and arms. The woman is opening a door (probably the door of her house) to a visitor, a male; she is looking at him in a seductive way. The image emphasizes the brand's connotation that *Visit* is a romantic sensual fragrance that makes you desirable and also ready for an intense encounter. The Arabic target image has been transmuted; the model's nude body parts have been covered; only her neck and a small part of her upper chest can be seen. Omission has also been employed by removing the opened door and the man who is visiting the woman; this contradicts the connotation of the original brand name *Visit*. By adjusting elements in the image, the Arabic advert has become meaningless.

Omission of models' images has mostly been employed in adverts of fragrances; for example, the fragrance *Eau Mega*. The word *Eau* refers to "perfume", "*Mega*" means "huge"; that is to say, when using this fragrance, you will get an everlasting fragrance like a magic potion that makes you "megafy" yourself to become the center of attention, "larger than life" as mentioned in the slogan. The idea of "hugeness" is reflected in the image of the original advert; it depicts a giant woman in a city, the woman is occupying an important space in the image, she is taller than the skyscrapers there, part of her dress is flying everywhere in the city covering the taller buildings, the connotation of "hugeness" of the brand *Eau Mega* is stressed through the visual elements. Yet, the image has been removed and replaced by a picture of the fragrance bottle in the target version; the image has not been replaced by any other visual elements to preserve the connotation of "*Mega*" or hugeness.

The significant use of omission for a functionalist equivalence in visual elements is mostly motivated by cultural, religious and ideological constraints. They play an important role in determining the choice of certain strategies when the source campaign draws on specific social or emotional settings. For example, the English advert, *Goodbye cellulite* by *Nivea* shows two semi-naked women in the beach enjoying themselves; the two women are replaced by an Arabic woman sitting at home by herself. This can be seen also in the fragrance advert *Visit*, it features a woman wearing an evening dress and preparing to go out with her partner; this is replaced in the Arabic version by a woman wearing a casual dress and relaxing at home. This type of replacement is motivated by the difference in the ideological context of Arab and American women, where the former are expected to focus on their home life and the latter are seen to be keen on having fun and enjoying life outside the home context.

In short, almost all adverts in this study show that there are relationships that exist between brand names and images of models' bodies. The connotations transmitted by these adverts are lost when the images are omitted. Although removing elements such as eroticism fits the norms of the Arab culture, it disrupts the image-text relationship patterns of the advertisement and obscures some important messages of the original texts (Al-Shehari 2001, 145).

### 7.3 The uselessness of skopos theory in textual elements

According to the findings of this study, 13 adverts out of 40 did not use skopos theory in transferring textual elements from English to Arabic. This is due to marketing constraints; for instance logos cannot be transferred functionally (they cannot be transmuted) because they “are special designs of the advertiser’s name or company name” (Smith 2006). The logotype gives advertisers individuality, so that they can be quickly recognized by consumers. These logotypes are under copyright, so they cannot be easily changed and adapted for different alphabet. The challenge here is that only a small category of consumers can grasp the communicated message of products. Still, the consumers who do not have a high proficiency in the English language do not grasp the meaning of products. For example, the fragrances: *Echo Woman*, *Euphoria*, *Alien*, *Reveal*, *Outspoken*, *Covet*, *Vanitas*, *Absynthe*, *Muse*, *Idylle* are targeted to ordinary consumers; still their meanings are kept vague in the target version. For instance, the fragrance name *Euphoria* denotes feeling or state of intense excitement and happiness. It implies the idea that this fragrance is sensual and it makes a woman feel extreme excitement and thus reflects this “euphoric” feeling on those who are attracted to her. The Arabic readers might have an idea about *Euphoria*’s effect only if they understood the implied meanings of the word “*Euphoria*”. Moreover, omitting the original image of the advert and preserving only the fragrance bottle and packaging makes understanding the product very challenging. Maintaining textual elements and omission of visual elements (mainly the images) makes the message of the advert more ambiguous.

In another instance, the fragrance *Echo Woman* suggests the repeated heart-beats of the woman who falls in love with *Echo Woman* fragrance; the brand has the following connotation: using *Echo Woman* fragrance, you will become obsessed by this fragrance, it will ,thus, be an essential part of your heart or the echo of your heart. This is stressed by the slogan “*listen to your heart*”. The effect of the fragrance *Echo Woman* might be understood only if the readers understood the meanings of the word “*Echo*”. The image of this advert is omitted in the target version as well as the slogan, only the brand name is preserved in English. This is not sufficient for the target readers to grasp the whole message of the original advert. Instead of omitting the slogan, the translator should have maintained it and incorporated it in the general meaning of the brand name; that is to say, to summarize the general message of the advert in the slogan as in the following suggestion: *انت نبضات قلبي انت الصدى*. The slogan provided is a translation of the word “*Echo*” and at the same time it is indicating that *Echo* fragrance is dear to a woman’s heart that it becomes part of her heart or the echo of her heart. The Arabic pronoun *انت* is a pun; it has two functions: first a woman is addressing her fragrance; second, a man is addressing his woman who is using this seductive fragrance.

In short, if there are constraints that prevent a translator to transfer a brand name, he/she should make use of the headings or slogans or body text to achieve the skopos of the original advert and thus make it clear and meaningful to consumers. With the absence of the picture, one should make use of discursive creativity to lead a reader make a mental picture about the textual and visual connotations of the original advert.

### 7.4 The uselessness of skopos theory in visual elements

In fact, it is challenging to apply skopos theory in the transfer of images from the original adverts to the Arabic ones. An instance of this are the following adverts in which skopos was avoided: *Very Valentino*, *Experience Sheer Gloss Balm*, *Future*, *Lasting*

*Performance, Colour Collections, Essential Care, Poème, Beyonce, Look, Flora, Lash Extension Effect.*

Images of models or celebrities in these adverts were not transferred functionally in the Arabic version; they were maintained as they are; for instance in *MaxFactor* advert *Lasting Performance* foundation, the image depicts a face of a western young blond model; the result of the foundation is clear on her face; it looks perfect and refreshed. The image of the western blond woman is preserved in the Arabic version; this makes the effect of the foundation less convincing to Arabs since the skin type that is depicted in the image is not similar to skin type of Arab women. Instead of attracting consumers, the product might be rejected on the assumption that it is made specifically for western type of skins. So, the model in the Arabic advert should have better been replaced by an Arabic model to achieve a functional equivalence for the Arab consumers. In another example of the fragrance *Idylle* introduced by the French actress Nora Arnezeder, the image of the actress is preserved in the Arabic version. The image in the original version implies the idea that this fragrance makes a woman feel as seductive as this actress. The communicated promise of this fragrance would be understood by the Arab consumers only if they knew the actress Nora Arnezeder. Therefore, the image in this case is meaningless.

## **8. Conclusion**

To guarantee an effective communication of the translated advert, a combination of both a functional theory and foreignization theory (Venuti 1995) should be applied in both textual and visual elements of online advertisements. Skopos theory can serve in localizing adverts and adjusting them according to the local norms as well as facilitating communication between advertisers and consumers; it can thus help in gaining more market share and profit. However, foreignization theory can help in foreignizing or maintaining some key source textual elements in the target version, it also “restrains the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others” (Venuti 1995, 31). Foreignization strategy in translation can be used as a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and marginalization of other cultures by dominant Anglo-American cultures. It can be used as “cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations (Venuti 1995, 33).

In addition, foreignization (e.g. incorporating English in Arabic target adverts) should be used by translators as a marketing technique to attract consumers in the Arab world because the role of incorporating English in the Arabic adverts extends far beyond its functional and pragmatic considerations. Apart from being used as a language of wider communication in the field of advertising, the English language has become the emblem of freedom, liberty and political success (Al-Shehari 2001, 139). English often becomes a strategic choice of Arab manufacturers, appearing in the names or packages of the local products. The incorporation of the English language in brand names is seen as attractive, fashionable and persuasive. This hybridity of languages within advertising should be maintained /foreignized in the target version to preserve their double meanings that allow multiple interpretations.

Finally, foreignizing English terms and brands in the Arabic adverts would play an important role in preserving the linguistic and discourse creativity. “Translators should

foreignize brands to maintain their double meaning as well as their linguistic creativity. The task of arousing the audience's attention is challenging for the advertisers worldwide. Among the ways of attracting the reader's attention and raising their curiosity towards a product is by transgressing the norms of language or images in advertising" (Bouziane 2013, 150). The result of this creative technique is a maximum attraction towards a product. In this case, only foreignization strategy can maintain this linguistic creativity in the target version rather than skopos strategies.

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