

Advertising Slogans in English-Arabic Translation Syntactic Analysis

Radia BENZEHRA
Mentouri University
Constantine

Abstract

Brochures provide an extraordinary amount of advertisements and a rich corpus for the study of advertising translation. Within the advertising text, we can recognize the brand name, the logo and the catch line or the slogan. The purpose of the slogan is to reduce the advertising message to a short sentence or phrase. This paper attempts to identify the syntactic features which characterize the English slogan and makes it simple, memorable and original. The paper investigates the length of the advertising slogans: what is the average length of a slogan? Do advertisers prefer the use of sentences or phrases? Do they have recourse to negatives and questions? Which tense is commonly used? The paper then analyses the translations of the selected English slogans into Arabic to see how the syntactic divergences between English and Arabic influence the advertising text. Hence, the corpus for this study consists of a list of English slogans and their translations into Arabic. The slogans under analysis appear in the brochures of different British companies and organizations targeting Arab consumers.

A study of the slogan and its translation is quite useful because more and more international companies are marketing their products in the Arab countries and they are in constant need of efficient slogans to exhort the targeted consumers to buy their products.

Introduction

In recent years, advertising has grown in importance. Companies all over the world are always thinking up new ideas to promote the sales of their commercial products or services through advertising campaigns inviting the consumers to be curious about the information to be divulged. To be a success, a typical advertisement must draw attention. One way of provoking the consumer's attention and curiosity is to present him with something surprising and unexpected as Leech (1966:26) puts it: 'The advertiser has to buy his way to the public's attention.' This can be as well by the use of auditory and visual means (TV advertising) and/or linguistic means. In the case of brochures, the most important linguistic means to convey the advertising message is the slogan or the catch line. The latter is a caption to the pictorial illustrations which clearly play a subordinate role. So what makes a piece of discourse striking and easy to remember, especially when there are not important aids of memory – visual and auditory? Jingles, for instance, illustrate the case of advertising where visual and verbal communication coordinate. In addition to the verbal message, jingles are characterized by the use of alliteration and rhyme and are associated with songs or a piece of music. This characteristic feature of TV advertising serves better the vocative function of the verbal message. In the case of brochures, the role of the slogan increases as it is almost the only means to ensure the reader's attentiveness.

After ensuring the consumers' attentiveness, a slogan must also sustain the interest or even the amusement it has attracted. Hence a slogan must be easily grasped and assimilated. We suppose that in order to reach this goal, copywriters focus on the simplicity of its structure in combination with other linguistic factors, namely the choice of words. It should be noted that the study of grammar and lexis are complementary ways of analyzing advertising slogans though the present paper emphasizes mainly the syntactic features of a corpus of English slogans which appear in different shopping, travel, transport, education, health and medical brochures. The selected slogans are then compared with their Arabic versions. Some

examples, for which no translation is provided, are just quoted for more information.

Before going further, a word must be said about the structure of brochures themselves. In addition to a slogan, the standard components of brochures are: a headline, a mention of the brand name, the logo, a price-tag, the address of the firm and how to obtain further information. An illustration might occupy the whole length of the advertisement, and the various linguistic components may be placed at different positions to the right or left of it. The different parts of the message might even be superimposed on the illustration. It should be noted, however, that the various components of an advertisement in a brochure do not appear all at once such as travel brochures which advertise places to visit:

RICHMOND UPON THAMES
An illustration
LONDON'S MOST ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH
A web site for further information

In some other cases, the mention of the brand name seems sufficient to identify the purpose of the advertisement; a slogan is – then- not necessary such as the following ad:

234 DENTAL CARE	Illustration
Phone number	Address

Generally speaking, however, copywriters use a slogan which matches their purpose. So, what syntactic choices are made in the English slogans and what characteristic constructions are used when translating them into Arabic is a fascinating area of research

especially that one of the striking differences between English and Arabic lay in the area of grammar.

1 The syntactic features of the English advertising slogans

The following section illustrates the syntactic choices made in the reference corpus and how much frequently these choices are made.

1.1 The use of imperatives

It seems that one of the most striking features of the grammar of advertising in general is the frequency of imperative clauses. The semantic function of imperative constructions is to draw attention and this is exactly what a slogan must accomplish: attracting the reader's attention. As an example, we shall take the following slogans:

- a. Bicester village: **Enjoy the luxury of spending less.**
- b. **Fly Eurostar**
- c. **Live it. Visit Scotland.**
- d. **Visit London. Make the most of your stay in London.**
- e. **Ride in style with Hyde Park stables.**
- f. **Study the LITE way!**
- g. **The London pass: Save time queuing at attractions and Spend more time seeing the sights – All for one low fixed price**

Notice that imperatives are not accompanied by a negative form. Apart from one slogan used to advertise a travellers guide; **don't wait for the opportunity. Create it**, prohibitive warnings are absent in brochures. It can also be noted that (c) and (d) consist of a

pair of imperative clauses in apposition. In (g), the two imperative clauses are joined by a linking word 'and'.

Example (f) illustrates a slogan which uses the brand name LITE. LITE (London Institute of Technology and English) and the English word 'light' are homonyms. The use of a word which sounds like another word is referred to as a pun. Puns on brand names can help the brand name be remembered, and consumers may feel amused and interested.

We do believe, however, that (g) is too lengthy to be a slogan. On the other hand, we can note that though (b) is a two-worded slogan, it fully conveys the meaning intended by the airline company.

1.2 The for-phrases

Prepositional phrases beginning with for are not particularly characteristic of other registers of English. The for- phrases in (h) and (i) contain an abstract noun group signifying a benefit associated with the product:

- h. for all your health and beauty needs.** Bliss pharmacy
- i. England's North country**
...for the time of your life...
...the place of your dreams...

However, the following for-phrase contains a personal noun group denoting potential beneficiaries:

- j. for big or tall men HIGH AND MIGHTY**

This catch phrase is joined with the brand name in large type, but it does not seem to be the rule. In (h), the brand name is spelled

in small letters. The aim of using this type of phrases, in our opinion, is to bring the consumer to memorize the brand name.

1.3 The use of questions

A question generally presupposes an answer, but advertising illustrates a case of one-way channel communication (Leech, op. cit.) which forbids the addressee to talk back. The question that raises itself: why are interrogatives used in advertising since the interrogative remains unanswered or answered by the advertiser himself? Notice the following ads:

k. Why pay more at the airport?

We have cheap airfreight rates. Worldwide cargo services

l. Need a doctor now? Pharma centre. Pharmacy and clinic

m. Are you in pain? ALO physiotherapy clinic

n. Immediate answer to your gynae problems?
The gynae centre

o. Do you want to study in the UK? Look no further...

STUDY OVERSEAS UK (The British Education Consultants) ...

The consumers are first presented with a problem, a solution is then suggested. Actually, the brand name is the answer to the problem in all the examples but in (k). The answer is an affirmative clause introducing the company – the use of ‘we’ – and what it offers.

But the problem here is whether to consider these questions as headlines or slogans. Leech (ibid: 111) states that:

Interrogatives resemble imperatives in being stimuli which normally require an

active response from the addressee [...]. In advertising, both may have the effect of stirring the consumer from her wonted state of passive receptivity.

It follows that interrogative clauses, like imperatives, function as slogans which appeal to the consumer to search his memory. In fact, the copywriter intends to solicit a mental reply: 'Yes' or 'No' as in (l), (m), (n) and (o). In (k), however, the implied answer to this query is a firm negative: 'No, I should not', which is the kind of mental reply the copywriter would be interested in. Note also the imperative construction used in (o) in addition to the interrogative clause. We suppose that the aim is to disclaim the equality of competing brands.

The force and importance of interrogative clauses lie in the fact that consumers are no more passive participants in the advertising situation; they are rather active participants.

1.4. The use of dependent clauses

The following examples illustrate a construction composed of a nominal group associated with a dependent relative clause

p. the Lake District
q. REGENT STREET
Where you can really be...

WHERE TIME IS ALWAYS WELL SPENT

These slogans actually have a vague imaginative appeal. We cannot know how consumers conceive of the places, probably differently. Such slogans aim at sparking people's imagination. They can even cause excitement when pictured on TV screens. The spoken slogan may be more effective than the written one because of the combined visual and auditory impact.

1.5. The use of non- finite clauses

According to Quirk (1985:995), non-finite clauses 'are valuable as a means of syntactic compression'. The type of verbal group designated as non-finite here is based on the present participial form of the verb:

- r. **Walking wild in Scotland**
- s. **Reaching Great Worldwide Destination**

These non-finite clauses have no subject and are not coordinated with a finite clause. Such constructions are not tolerated in written English. Leech (op.cit.) explains that non-finite clauses are dependent in disjunctive and abbreviated grammars which are distinguished from the discursive mode of ordinary connected discourse. In fact, disjunctive language does not need a finite predicator as Leech (ibid: 93) puts it: 'there is no limit to the simplicity of a grammatical unit'.

1.6. The use of affirmative clauses

The most direct way to address the consumers is the use of first person addresser 'we' as illustrated in the following examples:

- t. **We buy new and used fine watches and jewelers**
- u. **We deliver worldwide**

**Documents and
Parcel Express**

The two companies here are advertising themselves rather than their products. The copywriter tries to win the consumers by explanation of what benefits the company brings or how it works. The use of the vocative is completely absent. But an affirmative clause seems to raise the consumer's curiosity as interrogatives or imperatives do. The consumers would probably ask: Who are you? The answer is, in fact, the brand name.

2. The translation of the English slogans into Arabic

The following discussion intends to highlight a number of problems posed by advertising translation. Does Arabic make a different choice of structures? Is there a disparity in the frequency of the use of certain structures?

2.1 The use of superlatives:

Two Arabic constructions not used in the English ads can be observed as being equivalent to imperatives (a) and (c) and the dependent clauses (p) and (q) as follows:

- 1.(a) أرقي مدينة تسوق خارج لندن
- 2.(c) اسكتلندا أجمل بلد لقضاء العطلة
- 3.(p) منطقة البحيرات من أجمل بقاع إنجلترا
- 4.(q) ريجن ستريت ..أحد الشوارع المعروفة عالميا بأناقة محلاته و ما تعرضه من سلع راقية

We really wonder whether 1 and 2 (the most + adjective) and 3 and 4 (one of the + superlative) can be considered translations at all. The translator, in our opinion, allowed himself too much freedom in rendering the original slogans into Arabic. The above translations can be seen as some of the commonest advertising clichés which emphasize the uniqueness of these places. The advertising message is too direct; it relates to the uniqueness of what is being offered. As for the length of the Arabic equivalent constructions, we can say that (4) is too lengthy compared to the original. So the superlative is used in Arabic to express a distinctive image of the place.

2.2 Arabic Nominal Groups

Nominal groups include structures which have nouns, pronouns, adjectives and determiners as their obligatory elements. The following translations illustrate the use of nominal groups as

being equivalent to different English structures: the questions (l, n, o), the declarative clauses (t, u) and the imperative (g):

- 5 (l) صيدلية و عيادة طبية على مدار 24 ساعة.
 6 (n) حل فوري لمشكلتك النسائية.
 7 (o) مستشارين في التعليم.
 8 (t) شراء المجوهرات و الساعات الجيدة المستعملة.
 9 (u) حي أف أس اكسبريس. توصيل الوثائق إلى كافة أقطار العالم.
 10 (g) كارت واحد ل الأندر كراوند و الباصات و حديقة الحيوانات و لندن أكواريوم و متاحف و أماكن أخرى كثيرة

What strikes us again is that the Arabic equivalent constructions (5, 6, 7 & 10) are explicit renderings of the original versions. Such translations cannot even be considered as slogans but rather headlines telling the reader – at a glance – the purport of the ads. Hence, we consider such constructions as simple designative phrases used to refer to the brand name. We suppose that rendering (t) and (u) as declaratives would probably sound odd in Arabic. It is difficult to suggest نحن نشترى or نحن نوصل الوثائق إلى كافة أقطار العالم ... as possible equivalents as Duff (1981:73) puts it 'It is the needs of the target language not of the source language that must determine the choice'.

2.3 Parataxis

We noted the use of non-linking co-ordination or parataxis in preference to linking co-ordination in the following translation:

- 11 (r) في اسكتلندا. الجمال.. الهدوء.. الطبيعة.. السلام.. المحبة.. أشياء جميلة تجدونها

Parataxis is normally not found in discursive Arabic as words are joined by a co-ordinating conjunction on every element. Parataxis suggests some sort of open-endedness, the reader may add as many nouns as he would like to. Noun group parataxis in (11) serves the purpose of listing. Semantically speaking, it has probably no more than an enumerative function. But what is clear is that the translator has taken the meaning of the English slogan far more explicit in Arabic.

2.4 Arabic imperatives

Some imperative constructions can be observed in the Arabic translations:

- (d) 12 تمتع بأحلى الأوقات في لندن.
(e) 13 تمتع برحوب الخيل في الهاید بارک.
(f) 14 تعلم اللغة الانجليزية و الكمبيوتر.
(i) 15 زوروا شمال انجلترا.

I shall start with translation 15 as it shows the translator's failure to find a slogan as original and imaginative as the English one. The translator contented himself with translating the headline in an imperative inviting the reader to visit the place in question. One wonders whether Arabic lacks figurative language or sentences which have an imaginative appeal; sentences or phrases which will have the same effect on the Arab readers.

On the other hand, translations 12 and 13 can be considered literal translations of the original versions as far as their structures are concerned. It should be noted, however, that in (d) there were two imperatives in apposition. The translator translated only the second imperative into an imperative which does not contain an idiom as the original. We consider translation 14 as a mistranslation of the original. The translator claims that the institute offers only English and computer science course which is not true. Such a translation may mislead someone interested in taking other courses. A reader interested in a marketing course will disregard the brochure in question.

2.5 constructions

Note the following translations of the for phrases (h) and (j) and the question (k):

- (h) 16 لكل ما تحتاجونه من مواد صحية و تجميلية. صيدلية بلس.

17 (j) للألبسة ذات الأحجام والأطوال الكبيرة. هاي & مايتي
لشحن أغراضكم لجميع الدول العربية ، إفريقيا، آسيا إلى العديد من دول العالم عن
18(k) طريق الجو، البحر أو البر.

16 is clearly a literal translation of the original. As for 17, whereas the English phrase indicates potential beneficiaries of the product, the Arabic version indicates what the shop offers. The name of the pharmacy and the shop are used in apposition with the slogans just like in English. On the other hand, translation 18 sustains our opinion that there is a tendency to take the meanings explicit in Arabic though a simple word-for-word translation would have been quite acceptable.

2.6 Questions

Contrary to English which favours interrogative constructions, Arabic does not. We noted one literal translation:

19 (m) هل تشعر بالام؟ عيادة (اي ال أو)

Arabic seems to allow the use of interrogatives, then one might ask: why have other structures been preferred to questions? The only plausible answer is that the translator's choice is a matter of personal preference.

Unfortunately, no translation is provided for slogans (b) and (s) though the other parts of the brochures are translated. Having no genuine ideas, the translators preferred keeping the original slogans. It is clear that a bilingual dictionary is of little help in translating advertising and the translator must work by intuition. Translating advertising seems to be largely creative. To end with, I should like to say that though the present paper is a syntactic analysis it also shows how the different meanings are shaped by sentence structure.

Conclusion

The analyzed scripts exemplify those features omnipresent in the English slogans such as imperatives, questions, for-phrases, dependent, non-finite and declarative clauses. The Arabic versions contain superlatives, nominal groups and a case of parataxis. The imperatives, the for constructions and the question used in Arabic are not always equivalent to the same type of constructions in English. This difference shows that the apprehension of the message by the English copywriters and the Arab translators is significantly dissimilar. Hence, the effect on the listener would be quite different.

As far as translation is concerned, the corresponding structures are not necessarily the same since; as it is widely recognized, syntactic divergences fade out as we move to semantics. It seems, however, that the linguistic disparity does not diminish at the semantic level. We noted that the meanings which are not so direct in English are often made explicit in Arabic. It is clear that a translation of the Arabic versions back into English (back translation) will not yield the corresponding English versions.

We can also say that the use of non-finite clauses, the for phrases and the dependent clauses indicates that there is less demand for continuity in this type of discourse even when there are no visual and auditory elements. We also think that the construction which best illustrates how grammatical complexity is reduced in English is the use of questions. The question expresses in one structure what would otherwise have been expressed in one complex sentence. Questions, however, seem not to be favoured in Arabic. Also, the only pronoun used to refer to the brand name in English is 'we'. In Arabic, no pronoun is used to replace the brand name. Imperatives and questions are particularly favoured in the English brochures; nominal groups seem to be preferred to the other constructions in Arabic.

A word must be said about the Arabic translations, the latter really overlook the vocative function of the advertising message where the focus is on influencing the audience. To end with, the English slogans tend to be 2 to 10 words long, whereas in Arabic the shortest slogan in our corpus has 3 words.

This paper shows clearly that grammar has an important bearing on advertising, and that more linguistic research needs to be carried out in the field as many multinational firms need to translate their campaigns simultaneously into different languages.

References:

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