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Sociolinguistic analysis of the adaptation of car commercials to the south Slavic market
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The means used by commercials' authors in order to influence the consumers' (sub)consciousness are far from being random and naive. Previous studies have shown that even big, worldwide known corporations have to determine the referential framework of the consumers of their products, no matter how well known they might be on the global market. This paper presents the results of socio-linguistic analysis of the adjustment of commercials to different markets. More precisely, examples of commercials from car industry are used in order to identify which linguistic strategies are applied in the source language of a commercial text, and which are used in the language adapted to a specific target group (in this study, the South-Slavic speaking countries), as well as linguistic and extra-linguistic reasons leading to such changes.

Key words: commercials; car industry; Croatian language; Serbian language; Slovenian language; Bosnian language

Sažetak: U izlaganju se donose rezultati sociolingvističke analize prilagodbe reklama iz automobilske industrije različitim tržištima. Konkretno, utvrđuju se jezične strategije koje se rabe u izvornom jeziku reklamnog teksta i u jeziku prilagođenom određenoj ciljnoj skupini (u ovom je istraživanju to južnoslavensko govorno područje), te jezični i izvanjezični razlozi koji dovode do takvih promjena.

Ključne riječi: reklame; automobilna industrija; hrvatski jezik; srpski jezik; slovenski jezik; bosanski jezik

1. Commercials as a part of cultural heritage -- cultural heritage as a part of a commercial

The patterns for conveying message about a certain product or service offered on the market and to the consumers, regardless of different media of its transmission, are permanent and based on reference framework\(^\text{138}\) of a human community as a whole.

The basic feature of commercial messages is a possibility to "use and exploit" elements of all styles (not only linguistic ones!), "whereby audio and visual elements take on a part of the meaning of a message", so commercials include "a new, artificial speech, adapted to the manners of expression and actual needs of a discourse type" (Kovačević – Badurina, 2001, s. 160 – 161), i.e. art form in itself whose own works in turn influence culture, language, art, symbols, trends; in a word: it influences us and our everyday life (Belak, 2008, s. 104).

\(^{138}\) The phrase reference framework refers to the "set of meanings relevant for our experience", i.e. "material which forms a worldview (Belak, 2008, s. 100).
If we accept the above interpretation of foundations of advertising industry (and there is no reason why we should not accept it!), the question is what is it that gives additional value to a product with a potential buyer when deciding about buying it.

In marketing terms, value is a subjective category different for different consumers. However, relevant marketing disciplines agree that it is a result of the following four key factors (Kotler, 1994):

1. Cultural (culture, subculture, social class)
2. Social (reference groups, families, roles and status)
3. Personal (age / life cycle stage, occupation, economic circumstances, lifestyles, personality / self-concept)
4. Psychological (motivation, perception, learning and beliefs/attitudes).

Marketing experts aim at making phrases such as "global village", "global communities" and "global tribes" "reality" in the mass advertising industry as well. However, nowadays all indicators suggest that "global homogeneous markets exist only in the minds of international marketing managers and advertising people. Even people with similar lifestyles do not behave as a consistent group of purchasers because they do not share the same values" (de Mooij, 2010, s. 10).

The fact that the relation between cultural heritage and advertising is nowadays still at the centre of interest of a large number of different studies only confirms the role of culture in determining consumers' needs, habits and behaviour in general.

2. Analysis of car commercials

2.1. Taking over advertising text

The topic of our study is adaptation of car commercials to South Slavic market which at the turn of the century had relevant car industry in the region.

More precisely, from June to August 2015 we followed corporative sites of car brands Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, Opel, Porsche, Renault and Ford139, which have had a significant share in the number of cars on the South Slavic market for decades.

The main objective of the study was to identify linguistic changes in the formation of commercial message for the same product with regard to the original (source) text. In other words, we tried to identify similarities and differences in commercial messages intended for Western European market (Germany, Italy, Spain) and similarities and differences in commercial messages intended for certain Southern European markets (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia).

Starting theses of our study are that commercial texts are rarely adapted for "smaller" markets and that the remains of joint political and cultural history of Southern Slavic countries reflect in advertising texts as well.

139 Analysis included 17 car models in total. However, due to restricted length, we will mention only few examples.
While studying car commercials on web pages of certain car selling companies (official representatives of the above car brands), we noticed that foreign advertisements adapt to different speaking areas in different ways: from literal and free translation (adaptation) to the localization\textsuperscript{140} of commercials in a certain socio-cultural area. In addition to different ways of adaptation, certain commercials keep they form in foreign languages and are not translated. More precisely, when it comes to car commercials, slogans of car brands mostly keep their foreign form:

\textit{Passion for life.} (Renault)
\textit{Go Further.} (Ford)
\textit{Wir leben Autos.} (Opel)

The reason why a vast majority of slogans has remained untranslated lies in its memorability and recognisability. As we have previously mentioned, a slogan is a trademark of brand and as such, precisely due to systematic repetition over a long period of time, stays in (sub)consciousness (Singer, 2005).

Besides slogans, among car advertising texts there is a large number of examples of directly taken foreign commercials. Examples of such commercials have been identified on corporative web pages of car brands Mercedes-Benz and Porsche – it should be noted that Porsche's advertisements have not been translated for the Croatian, Bosnian and Herzegovinian, Serbian and Slovenian speaking area. We believe that the primary reason for such decision lies in the fact that Mercedes (i.e. some of its models) and Porsche are expensive brands\textsuperscript{141} that also present a certain status symbol, much like advertisement texts in English in non-English speaking areas:\textsuperscript{142}

\textit{Der Mercedes—AMG GT. Handcrafted by Racers.}

\textsuperscript{140} For more on direct transfer of foreign commercial, literal and free translation and localization of world-wide known commercials in Croatian language and space see: Stolac – Vlastelić (2014).
\textsuperscript{141} "Brand is truly the most concrete expression of a fact that we are all both sellers and buyers" (Belak, 2008, s. 54).
\textsuperscript{142} "The servile attitude of a part of our speakers toward the English language is probably best described by the epithet \textit{trendy} which then also serves to describe best the authors of commercial messages as they always adapt to target groups" (Stolac – Vlastelić, 2014, s. 176 – 177).


The advertising text for Porsche Boxter Black Edition has in German, Italian and Spanish speaking areas been translated into local languages – admittedly, keeping the same meaning, which confirms the irrelevance of any other information about the product in case of a well-known brand (Porsche in this case). Of course, this is an example of a kind of manipulation of consumers which, in the end, is the most central feature of branding.

2.2. Adaptation of advertising text

With regard to the transfer of text from one language into another, even today there is still a doubt whether the (literal) translation is sufficient, i.e. should we instead aim at adaptation. Translators are more prone to adapted text because literal translation often omits the said cultural factor.

Examples of partial adaptation can be found in commercial text for Volkswagen's model:

Der neue Passat. So souverän wie Sie.¹⁴³
CRO, BiH: Novi Passat. Suveren poput Vas.
SRB: Superioran. Kao i ti.
ESP: Nuevo Passat. Tan avanzado como quien lo conduce.
IT: Nuova Passat. Tua da € 23.900.

Along with certain psychological effects of the commercial on the recipients (word "advanced" creates context in which car is presented in his best possible light, i.e. it relates to positive characteristics of the driver), which has been kept in all variants of the commercial text, differences can be observed in the manner of addressing consumers. Namely, in the commercial for Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina formal manner of address is used (use of 2nd person plural for a singular form: Suveren poput Vas), while in the commercial for Serbian speaking area, which has also been literally translated, informal manner of addressing the consumers was

¹⁴³ EL: New Passat. As advanced as you are.
used: *Superioran. Kao i ti* (use of 2nd person singular for a singular form). Formal and informal addressing of consumers are two opposite strategies in writing commercial messages, and they depend on the target group. By using the 2nd person plural pronoun for a singular form (*V/A*), the commercial respectfully addresses consumers and aims to approach the consumers and gain their trust by being polite. On the other hand, using the 2nd person singular pronoun when communicating with someone suggests friendship, good and close relationship, unity, relaxedness and informal tone (Katić-Bakaršić, 2001; Udier, 2008).

The adjective *new* has been used in this commercial. Since this attribute is often used in commercials, it sometimes loses its true meaning because everything in commercials is usually described as *new* (Stolac, 2000).

Commercial for Passat has been translated more freely in Slovenia: *Novi Passat. Evropski avto leta 2015.* Here communication with the recipient has been achieved by placing an emphasis on the very important award received by this car. Construction itself does not use any personal form, i.e. there is no direct communication like in other variants. Spanish translation of the commercial is also freer and different with regard to the original German commercial, but semantically stays within the original meaning. Italian version of the commercial places flattering to customers in the background, emphasizing the price of the vehicle: *Nuova Passat. Tua da € 23.900.* Commercial strategy which uses prepositional form *od + određen iznos (from + specific price)*, which encourages customers to buy a car by emphasizing its very profitable price places agitative role of a commercial text that induces consumer's need to activate and buy (Udier, 2008).

The fact that the Southern Slavic region does not (at least with regard to the language of commercials) form a unique marketing area can be observed from the example of commercial text for a Mercedes car as well:

*Mercedes-Benz E-Classe Coupé. In Bestform.*

CRO: *U top formi.*

SRB: *U svom najboljem izdanju.*

BIH: *U vrhunskoj formi.*

SLO: *V najboljši obliki.*

IT: *La forma della perfezione.*

ESP: *En plena forma.*

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144 In Serbian commercial the adjective *suvremen* has been translated as *superior*, which has almost the same meaning as the adjective *sovereign* (http://kjip.novi-liber.hr/index.php?show=search).


146 EL: New Passat. As advanced as the one driving it.

Although words *top, perfect, superior* and *the best* have the same meaning within this context and have the function of superlativization of positive characteristics of this car model, in the Croatian version of the commercial the used form is "top" which is taken from the English language and which belongs to Croatian colloquial style (unlike forms used in other South Slavic languages).

Extensive adaptation (or, as it is rarely named, freer translation) can be found in the example for Mercedes-Benz CLS class:

**Die neue Generation des CLS Coupé. Licht. Gestalt.**

CRO: Osjećaji i razum nikad nisu bili prisniji.
SRB: Strasno pragmatičan.
BiH: Sportski izgled s ukusom!
SLO: Čutnost i dovršenost.
IT: CLS. Luce. Forma.
ESP: Seductor, deportivo y exclusivo.

In addition to the already mentioned adjective *new*, the original commercial also uses semantically empty words *light* and *form.*

In Croatia this commercial has been translated as *Osjećaji i razum nikad nisu bili prisniji.* It is well known that sensuality and sense often present two semantically opposite notions; however, the commercial "guarantees" that this car can satisfy both those guided by the sense and those guided by the feelings.

Although Serbian, Bosnian and Slovenian translations have used different words and different syntactic structures, the main message follows the same path: car will satisfy both those traditional ones and those looking for a change.

Without mystifying this car’s attributes, the Spanish version of the commercial is: *Seductor, deportivo y exclusivo,* and it is based on adjectives that, of course, try to present this car in the best possible "light".

Tendency of Spanish copywriters to adapt original foreign commercials is confirmed in the example for Mercedes-Benz A-class:

**Die A-Klasse. Bereit für eine neue Generation.**

CRO: Puls nove generacije.
SRB: Puls nove generacije.

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149 Visual part of the commercial for the model is focused on a dimly lit car parked in an empty warehouse.
150 EL: Sensuality and sense have never been closer.
151 EL: Seductive, sporty and exclusive.
152 EL: Class A. Ready for the new generation.
BH: Puls nove generacije.
SLO: Pripravljen na novo generacijo.
IT: Frezzo a partire da € 23.880.
ESP: Diseñado para conquistar.

In South Slavic market this commercial appears with the same semantic message as in the original commercial and mostly with the same sentence,\textsuperscript{153} while Spanish commercial text has semantically departed from the original.\textsuperscript{154}

2.3. Localization of advertising text

When transferring commercial text into other space and other language, its complete adaptation to the area for which it is intended presents a great challenge (Stolar – Vlastelić 2014).

For example, the commercial for Volkswagen Golf Cabriolet has been successfully localized for the Croatian area. The German version of the commercial is: Mein Himmel. Mein Golf Cabriolet. (My heaven. My Cabriolet)\textsuperscript{155}, but Croatian version has been completely changed: Golf Cabriolet. Najviše smo se zabavljali u avtima bez krova.\textsuperscript{156} Although German commercial uses anaphora to achieve rhythm and make commercial easy to remember, Croatian commercial reminds us of "good, old times" when middle-aged people (potential buyers of this car) were young.\textsuperscript{157}

Nevertheless, such examples are only exceptions when it comes to the localization of advertising texts. Localization of foreign commercials to Southern Slavic area nowadays mainly comes down to persuasive strategy\textsuperscript{158}, which is well-known and efficient in marketing, and which includes engaging popular local (or regional) persons during advertising campaign as a "guarantor" for the product quality. An example of such promotion is the following sales campaign for Volkswagen cars: Čestitamo Seve! Blago VW vozacima!\textsuperscript{159}

3. Conclusion

Advertising experts use numerous linguistic and extra linguistic means in order to influence the opinion of potential buyers, i.e. to lead them to believe that the

\textsuperscript{153} EL: The Pulse of a New Generation.
\textsuperscript{154} EL: Designed to seduce.
\textsuperscript{155} EL: My heaven. My Cabriolet.
\textsuperscript{156} EL: Golf Cabriolet. We had the most fun in cars without roof.
\textsuperscript{157} This model was not offered on Volkswagen's official pages in other observed countries.
\textsuperscript{158} EL: Congratulations, Seve! VW drivers can call themselves lucky. For more on persuasive techniques and manipulative strategies in communication see: Odalol, 2015 and Odalol, 2016.
\textsuperscript{159} Seve is a nickname of a popular Croatian singer Severina Vućković.
advertised product is exactly what they need. The means used differ according to the commercial's target group, and according to the language area. Even the worldwide known car brands are susceptible to certain type of linguistic adaptation to the new area.

Analysed corpora indicate minimum shifts in the creation of an advertising text with regard to the original text. Furthermore, almost all slogans, and often the commercial's source text are in English (regardless of the seat of an automobile company), which is a further evidence of an attempt to create "global market". Certainly, it is also a testimony of a current status of the English language which is still a "guarantor" of quality and exclusivity, as well as certain "intellectual laziness" in the non-English speaking areas.

When it comes to the adaptation of a commercial to Western European market, somewhat greater freedom of adaptation was observed in Spain, while Italian commercials often state the price of a model along its name.

Car commercials intended for the Southern Slavic market semantically mainly follow the source text, with only occasional examples of variations.

Although this is an area with long shared socio-cultural and political tradition, commercials are linguistically adapted to each country (whereby syntactic structures, with regard to the shared base of a standard language, in advertisements in Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian language match). However, cultural localization, which would influence the language of a commercial message itself, is missing, i.e. it is reduced to the level of advertising statement of a local (usually showbiz) celebrity.

An advertisement is always an unexpected combination of known and new elements. When an advertisement cannot be adapted (i.e. when this is not cost-effective) to a different area, other options include its translation of better or worse quality, i.e. its adaptation to a lesser or greater degree. In case of advertisements, their objective is to enable consumers to "just sit and enjoy the ride".

References


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