

PERSONALIZATION AND INCLUSION IN LATVIAN ADVERTISING AS A RESULT OF MULTICULTURAL PROCESSES

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Abstract. This paper examines how multicultural processes contribute to the formation of the features of Latvian advertising language – personalization and inclusion. The imperative mood, the singular and the plural form of the 2nd person pronoun are considered as means of making the advertising message more personal. Strategies for including the audience in translated advertisements are discussed. Understanding of these features is of major importance for Latvian translators who deal with trans-linguistic, trans-market, and trans-cultural transfer of promotional and advertising texts.

Key words: advertising discourse analysis, translation, culture, Latvian, language

Advertising has been discussed in a variety of cross-disciplinary studies. The attention of translation scholars has focused on the strategies for trans-linguistic, trans-market, and trans-cultural transfer of promotional and advertising texts that underscore the role of the translator (Torresi, 2010). A translator's decisions depend on the cultural knowledge that, with regard to advertising, has been discussed in works dealing with gender roles and gender stereotypes (Ferguson, 1990: 11; Jones, 1991: 13; Sengupta, 1995: 2; Jones, 1998: 14), as well as with the cultural dimensions of different nations (Hofstede, 1980; Gilly, 1988; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Milner and Collins, 2000; Hofstede, 2001).

The features of the language used in advertising as well as its effect on Latvian in general have been discussed by Latvian scholars (Zauberga, 1996; Veisbergs, 1997; Ločmele, 1998; Liepa, 2010). The cultural issues of advertisement transfer have been analyzed in our previous work (Ločmele, 1999a; 1999b; 2003). The present paper is a continuation of this study, with a focus on current multicultural processes that leave their impact on the features of Latvian advertising language – personalization and inclusion.

PERSONALIZATION

Personalization is important in all types of advertising. The imperative mood and both the singular and the plural form of the 2nd person pronoun are used in order to make the message personal.

Although using the singular form of the 2nd person pronoun is considered impolite behaviour when addressing a stranger, or an elderly person in particular, copywriters use it. It seems that this happens due to the influence of English advertising texts where the 2nd person pronoun has one form for singular and plural, and where advertising addresses its audience more directly and the distance between the text and the addressee is smaller than in Latvian. In Latvian, the usage of the singular form of the 2nd person pronoun creates a feeling that the main addressee of advertising is a young person that might be viewed as offensive towards older generations. Moreover, Latvian copywriters and translators seem to be guided by intuition when using the singular or the plural form of the 2nd person pronoun, as they use it inconsistently. The same lack of consistency can be observed in the spelling of the forms of the 2nd person pronoun with an upper-case letter (according to the Latvian convention for personal address in a personal letter) or a lower-case letter.

In a considerable number of texts both forms are used: the singular form of the 2nd person pronoun is used in the headline and in the subheading, while the plural form of the 2nd person pronoun is in the body of the text.

Some of the texts show editors' errors in the agreement between the form of the 2nd person pronoun and the form of a verb (in Latvian, the pronoun is matched with the appropriate verb ending). This indicates the difficulty, the internal discussions about the choice of the form of the 2nd person pronoun in the agency.

Ten years ago, there were cases when translators deliberately avoided using the 2nd person pronouns in the Latvian target text, whereas the ST in English contained more than 10 instances of their usage. Thus, a distance was created between the advertised product and the addressee, making the advertisement less personal in Latvian. A reason for this was undeveloped skills for advertising in Latvian and indecisiveness about the correct form of the pronoun to be used. Another possible cause for the lack of personalization at the beginning of advertising after Latvia regained independence in 1991 was the tradition of preserving a large power distance in Latvian culture (see Hofstede, 2001 on cultural dimensions). Due to globalization, distancing in Latvian advertising has decreased, causing a more frequent use of the 2nd person pronouns. However, the problems of choice of the correct form of the 2nd person pronoun sometimes result in the avoidance of direct address. Thus, while the Russian version of the text of the flyer for the brand outlet sale contains the singular form of the 2nd person pronoun: 'Наконец-то ты сможешь нормально одеться' (Literally: 'Finally, you will be able to dress well'), the Latvian text opts for a conversational, yet impersonal: 'Beidzot varēs kārtīgi apģērbties.' (Literally: 'Finally, it will be possible to dress well').

In the next case, the advertisement for the Latvian Mobile Telephone company (LMT) services with the headline 'Līdzsavienojums + Konferences zvans. Nepalaid garām nevienu zvanu!' ('Call Hold + Conference Call. Don't miss

a single call!') has a text that avoids addressing a customer directly in an unusual way for the Latvian advertising language:

Ja **vēlas** atteikties no šīs iespējas vai atkārtoti pieslēgt to, visērtāk to izdarīt LMT abonentu apkalpošanas centrā internetā – iCentrā [...]. ('If one wants to opt out of this offer or reconnect it, the most convenient way to do it is in iCentre, the LMT customers service centre on the Internet')

The new service is called *Līdzsavienojums* ('Call Hold') and *Konferences zvans* ('Conference Call'), however, due to excessive compression in the headline, the capitalization in the second word combination (*Konferences zvans*) may seem unmotivated and used under the influence of the English language, as according to the Latvian language conventions, only the first word of the headline starts with an upper-case letter, contrary to the English tradition to capitalize all nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs of a headline.

The singular form of the 2nd person pronoun plays a more significant role in personalization. However, one should take into account the cultural conventions of Latvia, namely, excessive familiarity may cause a negative effect. One should also note that personalization does not occur if the plural form of the 2nd person pronoun starts with a lower-case letter in Latvian because everybody is addressed in such a case, however, no one is addressed personally.

INCLUSION

Advertising has to include, and not exclude, a person from its scope of readers, listeners or viewers. One needs to consider this inclusion when translating advertisements. An advertising brochure for the beauty salon *ESPA Rīga* is inconsistent in following the principle of inclusion:

Rīgā, vienā no lielākajām Baltijas tirdzniecības ostām, atspoguļojas bagāts kultūrlānis, gadsimtu burvība atklājas gan viduslaiku un neoklasicisma, gan lielākoties jūgendstila ēkās, kas sarindojušās gar Rīgas bruģētajām ielām.

('In Riga, one of the largest commercial ports of the Baltics, a rich culture layer is revealed. The charm of the centuries is reflected in both the Medieval and the Neo-Classical, and mainly in the Art Nouveau buildings that arrange themselves along the cobblestone streets of Riga')

Residents of Riga are not included in the fragment of the text, and information is provided only from the external point, i.e. for visitors of Riga. Besides, the information is misleading, as it makes one think that all of Riga is built in the Art Nouveau style and has cobblestone streets. Further on, the text attempts at resolving the inclusion problem by using the pronoun '*mūsu*' ('our'):

Daudzslāņainā pilsētvide ietver krievu, vācu un skandināvu dzīvesstila atblāzmu, kas sajūtama **mūsu** pilsētas kafejnīcās mūzikas un mākslas dzīves norisēs, ik uz soļa.

(‘The multilayered city includes reflections of the Russian, German and Scandinavian lifestyles that are felt in the cafés of our city, in the music and art life, and at every step [you make]’)

However, the pronoun ‘*mūsu*’ does not include all Rigans, as only Russians, Germans and Scandinavians are mentioned among the citizens of Riga. The part of the audience, who consider this as a case of putting down the Latvian heritage, is lost.

A copywriter attempts to correct this mistake further in the text by mentioning the architectural contribution of the Latvian architect *Konstantīns Pēkšēns*. However, due to the lack of clarity in presenting the information the text excludes and loses all addressees:

Ievērojamā latviešu arhitekta Konstantīna Pēkšēna veidotā izsmalcinātā tīģeļa sirdī esošā fin de siécle ēka piedzīvojusi jaunu renesansi ...

(Literally: ‘The fin de siécle building, which has been created by the prominent Latvian architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns and is situated at the heart of the refined melting pot, has experienced a New Renaissance...’)

The French *fin de siècle* (‘the end of the century’) is used not for information, but for creating the atmosphere, however, it makes the illogical text even more complicated. The fragment ends with an ellipsis that indicates that the text will continue. Yet, a large part of the Latvian target audience is lost in the first paragraphs of the advertisement.

The Russian version of the text is provided next to the Latvian text in the brochure. Although the Russian text contains the same mistakes of inclusion (the residents of Riga are included only in the second sentence), the Russian text does not contain the factological errors observed in the Latvian version. The Art Nouveau buildings are described as the most famous ones, the cultural heritage of the city includes the contribution by Latvians, and the Russian text does not suffer from the excessive use of complicated and untranslated borrowings:

Рига, как один из ключевых портов Прибалтики, вобрала в себя много влияний, которые видны в средневековых домах, зданиях в стиле неоклассицизма и самых известных – югендстиля, которые выстроились на её мощёных улочках.

Космополитическая атмосфера города, которая включает в себя элементы латышской, российской, немецкой и скандинавской культуры начиная с её традиционных кафе и кухни и заканчивая музыкой и искусством, окружают Вас повсюду.

В самом сердце этого прекрасного города находится здание работы знаменитого латвийского архитектора Константина Пекшенса, которое пережило свой собственный Ренессанс ...

(Literally: 'Riga as one of the key ports of the Baltics, has absorbed many influences that can be observed in the medieval houses, the buildings in the Neo-Classical style and the most renown ones – the Art Nouveau buildings standing in a row along its cobblestone streets.

The cosmopolitan-like atmosphere of the city, which includes elements of the Latvian, Russian, German and Scandinavian cultures, from its traditional cafés and cuisine to its music and art, surrounds you everywhere.

A building by the famous Latvia's architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns is situated in the very heart of the wonderful city. It has experienced its own Renaissance...')

However, the text contains a politically marked usage of the word *российский* (literally: 'Russia's'), instead of a more neutral *русский* ('Russian'), and *латвийский* ('Latvia's'). Slightly boosting political connotations, Riga is credited as having cultural elements of Russia, but Konstantīns Pēkšēns is described as a famous architect from Latvia without a reference to his ethnicity, while the Latvian text underscores his Latvian origin. It seems that the Russian text is a translation of the Latvian text – the translator has created a clearer text, yet manipulating with its ideological overtones to increase the inclusion of the target Russian audience.

Untranslated advertisements for the products having a similar advertising campaign all over the world lately have developed an element for the inclusion of the audience – the Latvian translation of an advertisement provided in a footnote:

In an Absolut World opportunities always pop up.*

*Absolut pasaulē vienmēr pastāv iespējas. (Vodka *Absolut* advertisement, *Kas Jauns*, 2009, No. 27)

The translation may be misunderstood, as *Absolut* has no ending marking what its case form is. This causes ambiguity in Latvian – it can mean both the intended 'world of Absolut' and the opportunities that the brand may be provided with in the world, as the Latvian translation can also be interpreted in the following way: 'For Absolut, opportunities always pop up in the world'. Fortunately, both meanings are positive.

Untranslated advertisements are published considerably rarer than previously. However, one needs to be careful with untranslated words that can be read and understood differently in two languages: they may create either a positive additional boost or bring unintended negative associations in one of the

languages. The latest example in Latvia is an ad for an Internet computer software store called ATEA. When pronounced, the brand reminds one of the Latvian word 'ateja', which means WC. As a consequence, the advertisement *SONEX jauns nosaukums – ATEA* (Literally: 'SONEX new name – ATEA' (a WC) has caused unwanted humour.

Advertising reflects the cultural level of its producers who sometimes forget about political correctness and create discriminatory advertisements as in the following example:

Mans gribet remontet Tav's māja! ('I want to remodel your house!')
(The advertisement for the store of building materials in 2008).

It is a parody of the ungrammatical speech of immigrant construction workers, as it violates the Latvian spelling rules and mimics the speech marked by errors specific to the immigrant community. The advertisement has a picture of a dark-skinned construction worker. Due to this violation of the ethical and the speech etiquette norms this advertisement is not inclusive or appealing, but abusive.

Another reason for excluding the audience is using lexis and grammar that would be used in written communication when forms, mainly used in spoken communication, would be preferable (in translated TV commercials, for instance):

Atmodini jaunas šūnas ik dienu ar jaunajiem Dermo Genesis ādu atjaunojošajiem līdzekļiem. ('Awaken new cells every day with new Dermo Genesis skin renewing products') (TV3, 15. 10. 2008., 19:04)

The Latvian text would have benefited from a simple and understandable spoken form without the affix *-o ajiem* which complicates the text. On a side note, the word *jauns* ('new'), which is one of the typical elements of advertising, seems to have been used too excessively in a text as short as this. Thus, although widely used in advertising in the world, the full potential of inclusion has not been developed in Latvian advertising. This also applies to transferred advertisements from sources having more elements of inclusion than their translations, as well as translations of Latvian advertisements into other languages where elements of inclusion are added.

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