

# INFORMATIVE AND PERSUASIVE POTENTIALS OF TRANSLATIONS OF ADVERTISING MESSAGES BY NIGERIAN MANUFACTURERS: FOCUS ON THE PERCENTAGE AND ERRORS OF TRANSLATION

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## Abstract

This paper presents a statistical and textual analysis of translations into French of some advertising messages appearing on the packages of over ten randomly selected products from the food and agriculture industry. The products considered for the study are either made in Nigeria or marketed by Nigerian multinationals. The paper critically explores the information contained in these messages, grouping them under three categories: (1) information on the proprieties and virtues of the product, (2) information on the manufacturer's expertise and on use mode and (3) pure sloganeering. From this categorization, the paper shows the parts of the advertising messages that are preferably translated and infers the percentage of translation both for each product and generally. In its analysis, the paper indicates that the translations of these advertising messages are highly selective, covering over 53.8% of the notional content of the message in the source language and generally giving a greater importance to information bordering on the proprieties and virtues (benefits) of the product on promotion. The paper argues that the reduction to more than 40% of the notional content of the advertising messages in the target language theoretically and automatically reduces the potentials of the translations to inform and persuade the public in the target language as efficiently as their versions in the source language. The paper further analyses the recurrence of translational errors in the messages in the target language, and argues that these errors further reduce the informative and persuasive potentials of these advertising messages and tend naturally to indicate both translational difficulties and the alarming phenomenon of charlatanism ridden the translation profession in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Advertising Messages, Informative and persuasive Potentials, Technical Translation

## 1. Introduction

Most Nigerian multinationals and big enterprises have embarked on the translation technology as well as on the mobilization of bilingual/multilingual advertising messages as strategic instruments in their various marketing campaigns. They use translation and multilingual messages to promote and enhance the commercialization of their products and services in many international markets, especially within the ECOWAS sub-region. This is not big surprise as the country, through its high number of industries, exports a variety of manufactured products from the agricultural, petroleum, textile and food industries, to some of her neighbors, notably Ivory Coast, Benin and Cameroon among others. (Endong 2014; Salaudeen 2008; Leurent 2012:23; Goura & Obi 2001:12-13). The desire to explore as many international markets as possible is therefore visible in the increasing number of product packages that are being translated into modern European languages such as French, Arabic, Spanish and/or Portuguese by these different manufacturers.

However, translating advertising messages is always a complex task which demands a number of theoretical and practical considerations. Some of these considerations include the functions and principles of advertising messaging. An important consideration is that an advertising message is always aimed at enticing the potential consumer to be aware of the existence of a product in the market and to go for it. The translation of such a message is likewise expected to play the same functions, namely information and persuasion of the consumer. Achieving such informative and persuasive objectives always demand exceptional abilities from the translator. Archimede (2009:22) corroborates this fact when he insightfully notes that:

Un texte publicitaire, par exemple est normalement rédigé dans le but spécifique d'inciter les consommateurs à acheter un produit particulier [...] Selon ce principe, la traduction doit produire chez les destinataires un effet qui se rapproche le plus possible de celui qui est produit chez les destinataires du texte de départ. Un exemple qui illustre fort bien le concept d'effet équivalent est la traduction du mode d'emploi d'appareils de toutes sortes.

An adverting message for instance, is normally written with the specific aim of inciting customers to buy a particular product. [...] With respect to this principle, its translation should

produce on the target audience an effect which is almost as close as the one produced by the source text on its own audience. An example which better illustrates the concept of equivalent effect is the translation of notices of appliances of all sorts. [Our translation]

Given the relatively limited space packages offer for text and visual design, certain manufacturers (package designers) are often compelled to select portions of the message in the source language to be translated. It goes without saying that such partially translated advertising messages are notionally reduced and do not, in theory, have the same informative and persuasive potentials as their version in the target language. This paper attempts to demonstrate this fact. It explores the selective translation of a number of packages by Nigerian manufacturers and shows how these partial translations coupled with translation errors reduce the communicational and persuasive potentials of the advertising messages placed in these packages.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Packaging as a Communication and advertising tool**

Packaging is considered a solid brand communication vehicle. When properly translated and designed, it facilitates the effective promotion of the product being commercialized. Principally centered on two elements (words and visuals), good package design can create a powerful and persuasive form of communication in various situations notably in the context of advertising or marketing. Based on this premise, Iriwieri (2009:332) views the art (package design) as essentially concerned “with the problems of preparing and organizing visual symbols for the communication of ideas and information and satisfying the needs of the advertising and publishing industries”. In tandem with this observation, Pujiyanto (2013:74) contends that:

Packaging design not only serves as the container of product, but also is assigned as the message sending media. Indirect communication through packaging design media is the producer’s way of delivering message to the audience. The message delivered through the symbols related to product in packaging design closed with the audience’s social-cultural condition.

The information presented on product packages directly or indirectly plays an advertising function. It is an attempt at informing and persuading the consumer to go for the product on promotion. Be it to explore the proprieties of the product on promotion, its mode of use or the expertise of its manufacture, this information are aimed at ultimately enticing the potential consumer. A careful package design can therefore enable a product to be distinguished in the market and survive competition. No doubt, Mitul and Bhavesh (2012:49) argue that package has become an ultimate selling proposition to most big manufacturers, “stimulating impulsive buying behavior, increasing market share and reducing promotional costs”. Package also “attracts consumer’s attention to particular brand, enhances its image, and influences consumer’s perceptions about product”. It ultimately parts unique value to products and works as a tool for differentiation. In the same line of argument, Astri and Effy (2011:11) observe that good package design facilitate the differentiation of the product and is thus a must for effective advertising and marketing. They note that:

Companies are obliged to differentiate their products with those of their competitors’ through, among others, branding [...] In a modern retail store, consumers directly face a meeting point where various brands are displayed on shelves. [...] packaging plays an important role at this meeting point (also known as the point of purchase), as this is the most important point of interaction between brands and consumers; it is at this stage that consumers decide which brands to purchase [...] Accordingly, the packaging needs to be perceived as a highly important marketing communication tool in communicating the brand message, and has to be utilized to the fullest at the point of purchase in order to attract consumer attention.

A package should therefore be viewed as communication strategy and an attempt to skillfully advertise the product it contains and sell the manufacturer of the product. As a communication strategy (a text), a package is often designed as an advertising copy. It is circumstantially constructed or organized with elements such as a heading, a subheading, (a) visual(s) (an image of the product), slogans, user guide, distribution information, the manufacturer’s contact and expertise among other constitutive elements. Due to their reduced size packages often bear just a few of these constituents. Based on manufacturers’ marketing policies, some of the packages are conceived to be multilingual that is, translated into various languages to reach a heterogeneous public.

### **2.2. Translating Product Packages: Theoretical and Practical Considerations**

As shown above, a product package is a delicate type of text the translator is to handle. It can be viewed as an advertising text which, according to Newmark may be classified under vocative texts, alongside notices, instructions, propaganda texts, persuasive and eristic texts, and even popular fictional narratives. As an advertising text, a package is conceived to entice consumers to buy the product on promotion (the product it contains). Its translation should therefore naturally be aimed at producing on the target culture audience an effect which is substantially equivalent to that produced by the original message on its own public. This brings to the fore Nida’s (1969:24) theory of the dynamic equivalence. Nida explains that:

Dynamic is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalent response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose.

Based on this theory, the translation of an advertising message will consist in “producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning, and secondly in style” (Nida 1969:12). In tandem with this, Achimede (2009:22) notes that users’ guides embedded in packages are generally conceived to enable the user mount or use the product he/she has in hands. When the reader of the translation still needs to refer to the original to benefit from the equivalent effect produced in the source text (assembling or using the product in question), one may say the translator has actually failed in his task. The translation of users’ guides illustrates very well the need for the target text to produce the same effect as the original when doing the communicative translation of vocative texts such as advertising and propaganda texts.

It is equally important to note that the principle of fidelity to the original is to an extent downplayed in this type of translation as the translator is compelled to eventually (when necessary) “correct” wrong formulations in the original, so as to adequately reach the objectives set by the manufacturers in their advertising or marketing campaign. Fontanet (2007) corroborates this view when she contends that:

Il importe peu que la traduction d’un mode d’emploi emboîte le pas au texte original. S’il s’agit de monter une bibliothèque, l’essentiel est que le lecteur reçoive des informations correctes, claires et précises. Enfin de compte, la qualité du travail du traducteur ne se mesurera pas à sa fidélité à l’égard de l’original, mais bien plutôt au temps que mettra l’utilisateur pour exécuter le montage.

It is not, for instance, so important that the translation of a user’s guide be done according to the original text. If it comes to mounting a bookshelf, what is essential is that the reader receives a correct, clear and precise information. At the end of the day, the quality of the translation is not measured based on his faithfulness to the original text but is determined by the time taken by the user to effect the mounting of the bookshelf. [Our translation]

In principle, any translation exercise is supposed to consider the entire content of the original text. However, due to the reduced space often available for text and image design, most manufacturer often embark on a selective (partial) translation of packages. This selective translation consists in the transcoding of specific information deemed by manufacturers to be most important.

### 3. Methodology

This paper hinges on a textual analysis of over ten multilingual advertising messages by Nigerian manufacturers. It considers advertising messages placed on the packages of products made in Nigeria or simply commercialized by Nigerian affiliates of foreign multinationals. The study exclusively considers packages with multilingual advertising messages, particularly those with French translations. Products considered for the study include: *Golden Penny Spaghetti*, *Indomie Instant Noodles*, *Ballourah Perfume*, *B29 Multi-purpose Soap*, *Premier Toilet Bar*, *Milo*, *Annapurna Iodised Salt*, *Gossy Table Water*, *Aquabar Table water et Omo Multiactive*. These products packages – which have French versions of their advertising messages – were randomly selected.

The study has as one of its objectives to measure the degree/percentage of translation of the various advertising messages, using individual package sections (the various sections constituting the advertising message) as unit of analysis. It considers a section to be any part of the messages (on packages) that regroup specific information about the product on promotion. To measure the most translated sections of these advertising messages, the researcher organized the various sections in three categories namely (1) sections communicating the uses and proprieties of the products on promotion, (2) sections that indicate the expertise of the manufacturer and instructions to users, and (3) sections that constitute pure slogans. The study also considers a qualitative content analysis of various advertising messages to examine the various translation errors. In the last part of the paper, these translation errors are analyzed.

### 4. Results and Analysis

#### 4.1. A Selective Translation of the Advertising Messages

The results of the study indicate that the advertising messages are generally 53.03% translated into French (see Table 1 below). This figure however represents an overall tendency (a cumulated percentage). 5 of the 10 products packages considered for the study have their advertising messages translated at percentages which are equal or above 50. In fact, the percentage of translation ranges from 20% (for *Gossy Table Water*) to 100% (for *Milo*). Results clearly demonstrate that the most translated packages are those of products which are commercialized by Nigerian affiliates of foreign multinationals.

**Table 1: Percentage Translation of Advertising Messages**

Name of the Product	Total of sections en SL		Total translated sections	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Golden Penny Spaghetti</b>	13	100	03	23.07
<b>Indomie Instant Noodles</b>	11	100	04	36.36
<b>Ballourah Perfume</b>	04	100	01	25
<b>B 29 Soap</b>	07	100	04	57.14
<b>Premier Toilet Bar</b>	07	100	02	28.57
<b>Milo</b>	10	100	10	100
<b>Annapurna Iodised Salt</b>	09	100	08	88.88
<b>Gossy Table Water</b>	05	100	01	20

<b>Aquabar Table Water</b>	04	100	02	50
<b>Omo Multiactive</b>	11	100	08	72.72
<b>Total</b>	81	100	43	53.08

Apart from *Milo*'s package which has which has a complete translated advertising message, *Omo Multivariate*'s package is 72.72% translated. The results of the study equally show that the most translated sections are those that reveal the proprieties and uses of the products in promotion (see Table 2 below). These sections represent 48.83% of the total number of translated sections, against 32.55% and 18.62% respectively for sections presenting the manufacturers expertise/practical instructions and pure slogans.

**Table 2: The Most Translated Sections**

Name of the Product	Properties & virtues of the product		Expertise of the manufacturer and instructions		Pure slogans		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Golden Penny spaghetti	1	33.33	1	33.33	1	33.33	3	100
Indomie	1	25	1	25	2	50	4	100
Ballourah Perfume	00	00	1	100	00	00	1	100
Premier Toilet Bar	01	50	01	50	00	00	2	100
Milo	05	50	03	30	02	20	10	100
Annapurma	06	75	02	25	00	00	08	100
Gossy	00	00	00	00	01	100	01	100
Aquabar	00	00	01	50	01	50	02	100
B 29 Soap	03	75	01	25	00	00	04	100
Omo	04	50	03	37.5	01	12.5	08	100
Total	21	48.83	14	32.55	08	18.62	43	100

In the light of the above mentioned figures, one may observe that the various manufacturers (through their package designers) prefer to capitalize on the translation of sections that present the proprieties of their products. They view the translation of these sections of their advertising message as having greater persuasive potentials than the other sections. One can equally justify the selective translation of the various advertising messages to the desire by package designers to maximize the reduce space the packages provide for the placement of information in the various languages. The selective translation unarguably reduces to about 45%, the potentials of the translated advertising messages to inform and persuade consumers in the target language. It goes without saying that, it may be more effective – copying the example of *Milo* – to fully translate the product packages to maximize the communicative and persuasive potentials of the advertising messages in the target language(s).

**4.2. Translation Errors as Agents of Message Deformation and Misinformation**

The qualitative content analysis of the advertising messages reveals a considerable number of translation errors which tend to deform these messages in the target language. The translation errors are more the products of ungrammatical sentences formulations, typographical errors and wrong adaptations. These translation errors could concretely be categorized in two, namely counter-senses and non-sense. Good examples are

- (i) *INDOMIE Instant Noodles*'s translation of "turn noodle to the other side" as "*retourner-les a mi-chemin*", instead of "*retourner-les*" and
- (ii) *OMO Multivariate*'s translation of "hand washing powder" as "*poudre a laver a la main*" instead of "*lessive en poudre*".

These mistranslations may of course cause misinformation and frustrate the manufacturer's advertising efforts. Other examples are illustrated in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Translation Errors in Products Packages by Nigerian Manufacturers**

Product	Message in Source Language (English)	Translation into French	Solutions
OMO	OMO Multiactive, <u>Hand washing powder</u> [Slogan]	OMO, Multiactive, <u>Poudre à laver à la main</u>	OMO, Multiactive, Lessive en poudre
	New OMO Multiactive contains Max Clean particles to remove tough dried-in stains in one swift step!	Le nouveau OMO Multiactive contient des particules de <u>propreté maximale</u> pour enlever les tâches séchées rebelles en un clin d'œil.	Le Nouveau OMO, Multiactive contient des propriétés de nettoyage maximal qui enlèvent d'un coup les tâches rebelles, asséchées au linge.
	5 Steps to best ever <u>stain removal</u>	5 étapes vers le meilleur un <u>détachant</u> .	5 étapes vers un meilleur lavage du linge
MILO	MILO, <u>The energy food drink</u> [a Slogan for powdered chocolate]	MILO, <u>La boisson énergétique</u> .	MILO, Chocolat en poudre, pour la préparation de boisson énergétique
	<u>Prepared</u> [MILO] in Nigeria by Nestle Nigeria	<u>Préparée</u> au Nigeria par Nestle Nigeria.	Produit au Nigeria par Nestlé Nigeria.
	<u>Good to Know</u> : MILO contains <u>malt extra</u> with mixture of different types of	<u>La Bonne Info</u> : MILO contient un <u>extrait de malt</u> avec un mélange de différents types de glucides qui	Bon à Savoir : MILO contient du malt et des différents types de glucides qui apportent de

	carbohydrates that <u>provide energy and nutrient.</u>	<u>fournit de l'énergie et les besoins en nutriments dont a besoin l'organisme</u>	l'énergie et des nutriments au corps humain.
	<u>Good to Remember:</u> When mixed with milk, MILO delivers wholesome nutrition with a balanced ration of carbohydrate, protein and fat	<u>Le Bon Conseil:</u> avec du lait Nestlé, MILO assure une nutrition complète en apportant un taux équilibré de glucides, de protéines et matières grasses.	Un Rappel : pris avec du lait, Nestlé MILO assure une nutrition complète en apportant au corps un taux équilibré de glucides, de protéines et de corps gras.
AQUABAR	AQUABAR, <u>Premium</u> table water [ <i>slogan</i> ]	AQUABAR. Eau de table <u>première</u>	AQUABAR. Eau de table de première classe.
GOSSY	GOSSY. <u>Sourced</u> from natural warm spring	GOSSY. <u>Extraite</u> d'une source d'eau tiède.	GOSSY. D'une source d'eau douce et naturelle
ANNAPURNA IODISED SALT	ANNAPURNA IODISED SALT contains <u>the right level</u> of iodine	SEL IODE ANNAPURNA contient <u>le niveau requis</u> d'iode.	Le SEL IODÉ ANNAPURNA contient un taux normal d'iode.
	Iodine helps in <u>mental development</u>	Iode aide au <u>développement intellectuel des enfants lors de leur croissance.</u>	L'iode aide au développement mental de l'homme.
	ANNAPURNA. <u>Refined</u> iodised salt. [ <i>slogan</i> ]	ANNAPURNA. Sel <u>extra fin</u> iodé.	ANNAPURNA, Sel iodé raffiné.

A number of typographical mistakes and wrong adaptations may similarly be sources of non-sense and misinformation. Good examples of such phenomena are found in some of the translations of *Golden Penny Spaghetti* and *INDOMIE Instant Noodles*. The former, for instance, translates “add pasta and stir” as “*ajoutez pâtes et remuer*” instead of “*ajoutez les pâtes et remuez*”. Besides the omission of the “*les*” article in this statement, this translation totally distorts the messages of the source language and has the potential of misinforming the consumer in the target language. *INDOMIE Instant Noodles* similarly translates “your delicious noodles is ready to be saved” as “*vos délicieuses nouilles on prete a etre servie*”, instead of “*vos délicieuses nouilles sont prêtes à être servies*”. The above mentioned translation by *INDOMIE Instant Noodle* will naturally need a reader to seriously ponder on the mistranslation to decipher the actual message of the manufacturer. These two mistranslations and others illustrate instances of non-sense susceptible to frustrate the information and persuasion objectives of the advertising messages in the target language. As Achoimre (2014:87) insightfully notes,

What is important is that the translation work – including proof-reading – be properly planned, and sufficient time needs be allowed for this within the production schedule. Translation is a specialist skill. As such, you will need to engage the services of a competent, professional translator. Misspellings and poor translations can prove costly, even though the packaging may only contain a few words. Such errors may also reflect badly on the organization in question. All this can be avoided by engaging a professional.

One may equally note examples of translations which totally depart from the original text. One in point is Annapurna Iodized Salt’s translation of “iodine helps in mental development” by “*Iode aide au développement intellectuel des enfants lors de leur croissance*”. Besides the fact that it glaringly departs from the original text (the source text’s message) through addition of facts/information, this translation showcases a gross exaggeration, which could be viewed as a violation of advertising deontology. In effect, the advertising practice does not accommodate gross exaggeration but honesty and truth among other principles.

To these mistranslations, one may add restitution errors which tend to “hinder” text in target language to flow and thus affect the style of the message in target language. Some of these restitution errors show that translation has not taken into consideration the expressive use of language in the target language culture (French speaking countries). This is illustrated in *Milo*’s translation of the English phrases “good to know” and “Good to remember” respectively as “*la bonne info*” and “*le bon conseil*”. These literally translated phrases do not perfectly render the message given in source language. The two phrases are somehow idiomatic and should instead be rendered by equivalents. The English phrase “good to know” is better rendered by “*bon à savoir*” meanwhile “good to remember” is better translated with “*un rappel*” since the message (in this particular section) is centered reminding the consumer of the different virtues and proprieties of the product on promotion.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has presented a statistical and textual analysis of translations into French of some advertising messages appearing on the packages of over ten randomly selected products from the food and agriculture industry. The products considered for the study are either made in Nigeria or marketed by Nigerian multinationals. The paper critically explores the information contained in these messages, grouping them under three categories: (1) information on the proprieties and virtues of the product, (2) information on the manufacturer’s expertise and on use mode and (3) pure sloganeering. From this categorization, the paper shows the parts of the advertising messages that are preferably translated and infers the percentage of translation both for each product and generally. In its analysis, the paper indicates that the translations of these advertising messages are highly selective, covering over 53.8% of the notional content of the message in the source

language and generally giving a greater importance to information bordering on the proprieties and virtues (benefits) of the product on promotion. The paper argues that the reduction to more than 40% of the notional content of the advertising messages in the target language theoretically and automatically reduces the potentials of the translations to inform and persuade the public in the target language as efficiently as their versions in the source language. The paper further analyses the recurrence of translational errors in the messages in the target language, and argues that these errors further reduce the informative and persuasive potentials of these advertising messages and tend naturally to indicate both translational difficulties and the alarming phenomenon of charlatanism ridden the translation profession in Nigeria.

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