

A case for the use of Arabic dialect in the translation of English commercials

من أجل زيادة استخدام اللهجات في ترجمة الاعلانات التجارية من الانجليزية الى العربية

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Abstract

This study makes a case for the use of dialectical Arabic in translating brands and blends from English commercials. We examine the translations of two KitKat and Snickers commercials which contained word blends and slogan statements. As we do so, we compare the dialectical translations with the Modern Standard Arabic choices to demonstrate that dialectical translation better fits into the genre of commercials as a popular culture text due to three main reasons. These include the informal nature of dialectical uses, the greater variation in the linguistic patterns, and the greater flexibility in accommodating new blends.

Keywords: Commercial Translation, Branding, Blending, Dialectical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic.

ملخص

نقوم في هذه الدراسة بتحليل مواد اعلانية من اجل تبين مدى نجاعة استخدام اللهجات العامية في ترجمة الاعلانات التجارية من الانجليزية الى العربية حيث تم تحليل اعلانات لشركتي سنكروز وكينكات تمت ترجمتها باستخدام لهجات عربية وقد قام الباحثون بمقارنة كلمات من اللهجات بكلمات مرادفة من اللغة الفصحى للاستدلال على مدى ملائمة اللهجات لهذا النوع من النصوص والتي تصنف على انها جزء من الثقافة التجارية. وتأتي هذه المواءمة بسبب كون اللهجات تبتعد عن الرسمية في استخدام اللغة وتوفر مخزون من المرادفات لنفس الكلمة في نفس اللهجة وللمرونة العالية التي تبديها اللهجات في استيعاب الكلمات المستحدثة

الكلمات المفتاحية: ترجمة الاعلانات، العلامة التجارية، اللهجة العامية، العربية الفصحى، دمج الكلمات.

Introduction

Commercials are always with us in today's world; we hear and see them every day and everywhere. According to Cook (1992, p.182), they are “something of which we are part, and which is part of us (whether we like it or not)”. Commercial convey messages about products and services using various media outlets. In his report “Marketing Aptitude: Advertising” the American marketing expert Kotler (2016) defines advertising as “any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services through mass media such as newspapers and magazines”⁽¹⁾. Any successful advert must reach to a large audience, should be able to influence, persuade, create desire, and catch the eye, and should communicate its message using what ever available strategies to do so. Commercials often deploy images side by side with minimal text to achieve any or all of these goals. With such limited use of text, the commercial creator uses several tropes to increase appeal, such as images, background music, allusions, rhyming words, blends, brands, and figurative language.

Globalization has resulted in an increase in international trade; hence the need for commercial translation. In response to such rising need for

(1) Retrieved from the website <https://www.gktoday.in/gk/marketing-aptitude-advertising/>. The website provides famous quotation for renowned advertisement experts from around the world.

the translation of commercials, companies are more and more relying on the translation services of agencies and offices to convert their advertisements into Arabic language. Protranslate in Turkey, Trans Home in Egypt, Alsun Translation Services in Egypt and the UAE are only a few examples on the companies and agencies that provide services of this kind. These translation agencies offer a variety of services for international companies like Ford, Henkel, and Domino's Pizza, for example. The services related to commercial translation in particular include translating company profiles, brochures, product profiles, promotional materials, leaflets, and media advertisements. Among the techniques that have been employed in transferring advertisements are literal translation, adaption, free translation and recreation. More recently, we started to see translations and adaptations that use various types of regional Arabic dialects. The Egyptian, Lebanese and Saudi dialects are more commonly used in translation depending on the geographic area where the commercial will be aired. M&M, 7up, and Fairy washing liquid are examples on commercials which use dialects as their main language variety.

Since the 1990s, the trend of using dialectical Arabic has increased rapidly. The main reasons which have contributed to the wide spread use of the colloquial Arabic can be summarized as: the migration and contact with different peoples and cultures, the translation of literary works which rely heavily on regional dialects and vernacular English, and the increasing use of the Internet, social media, and TV productions which use dialects, sometimes, excessively. In fact, dialectical Arabic is increasingly being used not only in everyday communication but also in literature, politics and advertisements. There are four main dialects that are widely common in the Arab World. These dialects include, but are not limited to, the Egyptian dialect in Egypt and Sudan; the Levantine dialect (*šammī*) in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria; the North African dialect (*mağribī*) in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Libya; and the Gulf dialect (*ḥalījī*) in the Gulf States.

Recently, colloquial Arabic has been more frequently used in the translation of commercials in order to achieve certain effects on the

We demonstrate that dialectical Arabic provides for a more practical option in the translation of blends and brands in the Snickers and KitKat chocolate commercials.

Review of the Literature on the Translation of Commercials

The translation of commercials has attracted considerable interest among translation experts. Over time, the translation of commercials has evolved to show more concern with the context of translation. According to Bo (2014, p.708), the translation of advertisements was initially regarded as a syntactical and grammatical transformation with a focus on translation equivalence. At a later stage, text analysis and the equivalence between the source text and the target text were largely emphasized. With the advent of more pragmatic translation methods, such as the indirect and instrumental methods, the translation of commercials has displayed more concern with the effect on the target audience; thus, at this stage, translation theorists have emphasized the function of the target text more than the loyalty to the source text. For example, Li (2009, p.5) places commercial translation within the spectrum of the functionalist approaches; he favors a more flexible practice as long as the translation achieves equivalent effect in its new cultural context. Along these same lines, Arens and Bovee (1994) urge translators to observe certain contextual elements such as the product's features and its target market, the cultural background of the target receivers, their habits, life styles, tastes and preferences, and the simple and idiom free translations. These theoretical and practical concerns will require increasing flexibility when it comes to using dialects in the translation of commercials.

However, the use of dialect in Arabic commercials has not always been viewed favorably by Arab linguistic scholars. In fact, the debate among Arab linguists concerning this issue in particular shows disagreement between the conservative and more liberal scholars. On the one hand, there is this position that views it as a threat to the status and 'purity' of standard Arabic. Al-Shamri (2018, pp.17-18) uses examples from advertisements to argue that the frequent use of dialects is rather dangerous both on the language itself and on its users; Al-Shami cautions against the continuous exposure to dialect and its role in

Methodology

Building on the more liberal orientations to the use of dialect in translation, we have accumulated evidence which we employ in order to demonstrate that the use of dialect provides for more efficient options in translating blends and brands in commercials. We collected our data from two commercials which were broadcasted on Facebook and YouTube in 2017. The first commercial entitled 'Mountain Climber' by Snickers chocolate relies mainly on blends which were translated using the Egyptian dialect. This commercial features the coinage of a new word 'confatic' which is produced using clipping and blending of the two words confused and dramatic. The neologism, as we demonstrate in the next section on the translation of blends, will prove rather challenging to translate by using formal equivalents for the blend words and therefore will require the use of alternative, more innovative translation strategy. The second commercial promotes a new KitKat product which blends Oreo cookies with KitKat. The slogan statement which features formal English in the original commercial was completely replaced by an informal translation using the Lebanese dialect.

The two commercials are transferred from English into Arabic using formal translation; the images and the text in the original text are very closely rendered into the translated version. However, our aim is to demonstrate that although the ST and TT are almost identical, the use of dialect significantly helps improve the quality of the final output. More specifically, we will show that the use of dialect allows for the successful transfer of blends and brands which could not have been as feasible had formal Arabic been used.

Blending and Dialectical Translation

The commercial entitled 'Mountain Climber' was aired in 2017 to promote the new edition of Snickers. This commercial features the picture of a hungry young climber craving for chocolate. It contains very minimal text (one sentence + one word) and relies mainly on the use of blends to convey its message.

The commercial is filmed in a deserted mountainous area, featuring a young man climbing a rocky terrain. The young man is screaming loudly for fear of falling down a rocky slope. While he is holding tightly to his place, a mountain shepherd passes him by along with his goat. Signs of astonishment and surprise show on the shepherd's face. The camera then moves right, and we suddenly discover that the young man is lying on leveled ground and not hanging down a cliff.



Picture (1): Mountain Climber commercial.

At that exact moment, the word **[CONFATICT]** pops on the screen in bold letters to describe the young man's state. Now, we realize that the young man is not actually feigning fear; on the contrary, he is acting dramatic, weird, and silly because he is extremely hungry. The next sentence on the screen announces that only the Snickers bar will satisfy his hunger; the one sentence caption reads “hunger keeps inventing new problems, so we invented new crisper Snickers”.

The blend CONFATIC that appears at the end of the commercial is coined through blending the two standard words confused and dramatic. The initial part of the first word is fused with the final part of the second word. The new word has been translated into [مأفتر], a blend from confused and dramatic, which translate into [متوتر] and [مأفلم]

respectively. The translator borrows from both standard Arabic and dialectal language variety to render the word CONFATIC into Arabic.

Broadly speaking, blending can be defined as the process of fusing two or more clipped or shortened words. The purpose of using blends in advertisements according to Lundmark (2003, p.11) “probably lies in the ability to attract attention and to achieve a humorous effect.” Moreover, as stated in Fauconnier and Turner (1994, p.16), they are used in order to express the “new actions [...], new concepts [...], new emotions and understandings which are constantly emerging”. In addition, blends in commercials create new meanings which can be “creative, amusing and comprehensible but which, at the same time, subtly highlight positive characteristics of products and services and which can be powerful enough to make people act upon it” (Džanić & Žerić, 2016, p.13). In the Snickers commercial, the neologism CONFATIC blends the thrill of climbing, the feigned danger of falling, and the feeling of extreme hunger. It combines the feelings of strangeness, adventure, ecstasy, and anticipation. The words confused and dramatic render the strange and exaggerated reactions of the character ridiculous; hence, they ward off any fear and arouse audience laughter.

In the Arabic version, an equivalent blend was created using a combination of the standard Arabic for the first part of the blend and dialect for the second part. The first part of the blend **confused** was literally reproduced into **متوتر**; formal equivalence is used here because there is a word in the target language that reproduces the exact connotations of the source word. Meanwhile, **dramatic** has been translated into **مأفلم** which does not seem like a direct translation to the source word. **مأفلم** is a colloquial word that is derived from the word **فيلم** (Lit. film) **أفلمة** (Lit. faking) and **بيفلم** (Lit. acting humorously). All these derivations share the implications of faking stories for the purpose of throwing jokes. Accordingly, **مأفلم** signifies a person who fakes stories or emotions, overreacts to events, and jokes and tricks people into funny situations. Actually, the colloquial word occurs in an Egyptian pop song with the same title. The translator here resorts to the dynamic

equivalence by using dialectical Arabic to convey the full sense of the source word.

Having demonstrated the appropriateness of the dialectical choice, we will now demonstrate that the available equivalent in standard Arabic for dramatic does not carry through all of the contextual clues. The standard Arabic word for dramatic is (درامي), an adjective from drama which is used to inclusively refer to both comic and tragic genres. The word carries connotations of acting, but it does not include the sense of exaggerated response, faking emotions, or acting funnily. Accordingly, it would be impossible to reproduce the blend using formal Arabic. In fact, if we follow the blend pattern of the English blend, we would end up with the word مترامي, an existing adjective in standard Arabic which means expanding. In addition, if we unblend the two words by explaining the English neologism using for example متوتر و درامي, we will compromise the unexpected use of the words, which, in this particular case, and through using the blend, draws audience attention to otherwise common words.

The translator has creatively composed an equivalent blend in Arabic by quite liberally and creatively merging dialect and standard Arabic words. Since blends are classified as neologisms, we can use the model set up by Newmark for translating neologisms, new coinages in our case. Newmark (1988) states that "any kind of neologism should be recreated; if it is a derived word it should be replaced by the same or equivalent morphemes; if it is also phonaesthetic, it should be given phonemes producing analogous sound-effects" (pp.142-143). The phonaesthetic elements Newmark is referring to here would include the presence of certain sound devices such as those resulting from assonance, consonance, dissonance, and alliteration. As for translating blends, Tong (2016, p.215) argues that the translator can "disintegrate" and "reconstruct" the ST relying on his/her own understanding, or else s/he may refurbish his/her own encyclopedic knowledge with the author's schemata. Sometimes, Tong continues, the translator fails to refurbish the constructive frames or the schemata of the ST; therefore, s/he

could abandon both frames and create new ones. This kind of de-integration is creative in nature'.

In translation situations where the translator encounters a new blend such as the case in our example, more particularly, in mass culture texts such as commercials, the translator can act creatively by blending standard with colloquial varieties and formal with dynamic approaches. This is a case of innovation in the use of words by the translator that is similar to the innovation deployed in the creation of the original blend. Using dialect to replace Standard English blends can be successful and efficient for dialect words in Arabic, which often allow for a wide range of connotations that cannot be provided by using the Standard Arabic equivalents. Dialect can render better results in translating humor, sound effects, and the positively surprising blends in commercials.

Branding and Dialectical Translation

This section examines how the tagline "Have a break, Have a KitKat" is translated and treated in KitKat's commercial campaigns. It examines a translation situation where formal Standard English is replaced by informal dialectal Arabic translation. We will demonstrate that this practical move has helped maintain the right level of informality, closeness, and intimacy which often characterize mass culture texts such as commercials.

All of KitKat's campaigns feature repeated use of the word "*break*" which has been in circulation since the 1930s. The verbal slogan "Take a Break" has become equivalent to the KitKat brand. The commercials in picture (2) illustrate that this phrase was closely associated with the chocolate brand. According to the BBC news report from May 2017, the slogan "Have a Break" was registered as a trademark in 2006 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-39948718>).



Picture (2): KitKat commercials featuring the slogan 'Break'⁽²⁾.

In fact, the double meaning of the phrase 'Take a Break' is directly connected to two main themes from the KitKat commercials. It is associated with the tea break that was popular among the workers in the British factories in the 1930s. Some years later, the word “*break*” acquired a wider meaning and came to be associated with all types of breaks. Moreover, the word “*break*” in the tagline reminds consumers of the cracking sound that comes from breaking the two chocolate bars. In 1958, the tagline “Have a break, Have a KitKat”, a slogan coined by Donald Gilles, the executive at advertising agency JWT London, was used in advertising and put on packages (Davis and Durant, 2015, p. 137). Over time, it has come to be associated with the KitKat chocolate brand.

In the Arabic translations of the KitKat commercial campaigns, this tagline was reproduced using some variations like “بريكر وبريك”; all of

(2) Retrieved from <https://pdfslide.net/documents/kit-kat-swot-analysis-marketing-strategies.html>

these variations have been transliterated rather than formally translated, and they have been treated in a manner similar to the brand name for the chocolate. This tagline appears in Arabic campaigns as “خد لك بريك... خد لك كيتكات”, implying that the KitKat bar is the best choice for work or for leisure break time. Moreover, the phrase constantly features either implicitly or explicitly in the packaging and the campaigns of this product. For example, picture (3) below which featured on the KitKat official Facebook page in 2017 along with its Arabic version, announces the release of a new blend of KitKat with Oreo cookies' flavor. Although this commercial does not feature the KitKat's tagline, the sea, the beach and the reclining beach chairs with umbrellas, all imply an informal relaxing break time. We reproduce the ST and TT here for easy comparison between the English and the Arabic versions:



Picture (3): ST of the Oreo flavored KitKat.

The modern standard version sounds too formal for a mass culture text. It implies distance and a high level of formality which makes it rather inappropriate as a translation choice for mass culture texts such as commercials. The context of commercials requires informality, closeness and intimacy which cannot be achieved had the translator opted for the Modern Standard Arabic translation. In his seminal work on popular culture texts *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*, Brummett (2004) explains that mass culture expresses people's everyday life practices, choices and tastes; among the many taste preferences for mass culture consumers are informal styles of dress, fast food preferences, and the use of slang. These mass consumer behaviors both influence and are influenced by mass media texts such as commercials, rap songs, popular magazines, iconic brands, video games and social media, etc. As a matter of fact, the informal translation in commercials fits more the commercial textual context as well as the larger context of popular culture language practices.

In addition to informality which signals intimacy, dialectical Arabic allows for more flexibility because of the greater variation in the patterns of use for all linguistic items. For the demonstrative هذا [this], there exists no less than three dialectical options for the translator to choose from: هاد, هاذ, and هيدا. Likewise, there are more than three dialectical choices for the verb أشعر such as حاسس and حيسس. As a general rule, dialects provide translators with a larger stock of word equivalence and a wider range of phonological and pronunciation variation than Modern Standard Arabic can afford. As to the reason why such flexibility matters in translation, the answer is because it helps produce and reproduce the sound devices which were identified by Vasilova (2009) as the main characteristics of slogans and advertisements' text. Vasilova claims that these devices have the mnemonic effect on potential customers that helps them to better remember the text. The dialectical translation produces different sound effects such as rhyming final vowels (هيدي/ حبي), assonance through the repetition of consonants (حاسس و ماش الشمس), (الشمس). These sound effects could not be carried through had the translator opted for the formal translation.

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