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Technical Translation:

A Decisive Role in International Marketing Communication

BY FRANCIS BAO | *Senior Member*

TECHNOLOGY HAS BECOME a major force and power of world economy. Many high-tech companies are trying to globalize by exporting their products to other countries. For this reason, international marketing communication has become a very significant part of this globalization process. Indeed, the intensification of international exchanges involves a growing need for communication and thus of technical translation. The amount of technical translations is already substantial and keeps increasing. What is the role of technical translation in international marketing communication? The answer to this question is that technical translation has played a decisive role in international marketing communication and is a means of communication par excellence of companies exporting their technologies.

Localization is an effective method for cross-cultural marketing communication. Marketing translations require an ability to translate the text correctly and accurately, especially for high-tech marketing campaign materials, since cutting-edge technologies require the use of many special terms. What is important is that the text must still deliver the same message and retain the effectiveness of the original description; however, this has to be done in a different language and target a different culture.



From my own experience as an international marketing communicator in China, I have worked to assist an American high-tech company market healthcare products. These products feature the newest technologies that people in China have never experienced. Thus, in order to let people learn and become familiar with the technologies, and use them for their well being, technical translators not only must have the ability to translate from source language into target language but also need to modify the style of the text to be totally meaningful to the target audience. In other words, when the text is translated from English into Chinese, it has to be modified for the Chinese language and make the description meaningful to a Chinese audience. All lines in the description must be carefully translated to express the same message and energy of the original campaign.

Cultural differences as well as linguistic differences must also be incorporated into the translation process. An effective translation will not let an audience sense that the text was originally written in another language. This process requires experience and knowledge in order to determine how far the translation can deviate from the original text, and it must also produce a correct but non-literal translation which projects the message from the original text in a style suited to different countries.

Language can be a major barrier that affects international marketing communication. The language people speak is part of the culture in which they were raised or have adopted. Therefore, the language used in all marketing communication, including advertising, public relations, and general communication, should reflect the unique cultural expressions and values of the target locale. This is why technical translations of marketing messages for international campaigns often create contextual ineffectiveness, as those special technical terms cannot be easily translated; therefore, word-for-word conversions are not sufficient.

When I translated technical testing material of the healthcare products from English into the Chinese language, I found that context was a big issue for the translation since the structure of the Chinese language is very different from English. If the text is translated in a literal manner or word-for-word format, the original meaning of the material will be totally changed and may even mislead an audience. This problem will also cause a company to fail in marketing the products to the target consumers. A very significant fact is that consumers prefer products and communications that have local branding elements that identify with their cultures. People buy a product or service because of what it can do for them, not because of what the product and its feature mean to the marketing people. Communication becomes effective abroad only after the message has been translated accurately. Without this decisive step, the technologies and products are unlikely to make a significant impact on the

foreign consumers, no matter how many powerful effects these technologies can achieve.

Technical translation can result in three types of effects that will affect international marketing communication. The first one is a **zero** effect, in which the translation of the original message into the language of the foreign consumers does not bring any change to the communication status of a company, so that the technologies and products sales volume remains the same. The company will not be able to increase revenue from its products.

The second effect is **positive**. From international marketing expectations, technical translation almost automatically involves increased brand awareness and an increase in demand on the market targeted by the translated campaign. With this effect, technologies will be marketed successfully within foreign nations and the company will increase its profit worldwide.

The third effect is **negative**, in which translation will weaken the strength of a company on the international market. Ineffective technical translation will become a disadvantage for the technologies and products that do not serve the interests of consumers from different cultures. With this result, the company will eventually lose its competitive power on the global market.

The intensification of international exchanges involves a growing need for communication and thus of technical translation.

Technical translation increases the direct revenue of multinational corporations by acting as a leveraging effect on cross-culture marketing communication, as well as sales abroad, and it can be a strategic asset with respect to global business competition, in the sense that it enables companies to stand out in a highly competitive market. In addition, technical translation must become an important business function, which will encourage companies to adapt their marketing communication to the consumers they are targeting. Technical translation also will be a future trend that assists marketing communication professionals to globalize their products and technologies. ■

FRANCIS BAO, *senior member and past president of the STC Chicago Chapter, owns a technical writing and translation consulting company in the Chicago area. He has won several professional awards, such as the Chicago Chapter annual competition award, APEX awards, a president award, and a distinguished chapter service award. He has written articles for the chapter newsletter, Byline, and served as a competition judge for more than five years.*