

# On Translation Teaching of Cosmetic Brand Names from the Perspective of Functional Theory

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## Abstract

With the rapid development of economic globalization, more and more foreign cosmetics come into the Chinese market and successfully attract Chinese consumer's eyes. At the same time, companies are beginning to realize the importance of the brand names translation. In order to meet this demand, some universities have set up the relevant translation course. This paper mainly discusses the cosmetic brand names translation teaching from the perspective of functional theory, and it can be divided into five parts. The first part discusses the subject and purpose of the paper. The second part mainly introduces the related concepts and the development of functional theory. The third part speaks of the main features of the cosmetic brand names. The fourth part explains how to apply functional theory to the cosmetic brand names translation teaching, and introduces several strategies. And the final part is the conclusion. Brand names have its unique characteristics, and brand name translation teaching is the same. Through the study, this paper aims at providing suggestions on the cosmetic brand names translation teaching, thereby promoting the domestic cosmetics to go out.

**Keywords:** Cosmetic Brand Names (CBNs), Functional theory, Teaching, Translation

## Introduction

Translation is a complicated activity, which generally involves five elements: author, source text, translator, target text and reader. Translation is a dynamic process, which should not be regarded as being composed of several self-contained parts. Thus translation teaching is also complicated and dynamic.

However previous studies pay more attention to the role of the author and source text when discussing translation of literary works. Before the 1990s, Chinese scholars began to study brand names. In the 1990s, the translation of the brand names stepped into a more systematic research stage.

Many scholars had studied the differences between

English and Chinese brand names from the perspective of comparative linguistics, focusing on some translation methods, principles and types and characteristics of brands. The study rarely involves the impact of culture on brand translation, and there is little use of some translation theories in the study. Although the translation of brand names in this period was based on a summary of the analysis of certain trade names and their translations, they did not rise to the theoretical research stage, but they also provided valuable experience for the translation of trade names in the 21st century. Fortunately, since the 1970s, studies on literary theories have become more reader-oriented and target text-focused, which provided a completely new perspective for translation studies. Under such circumstance, functional theory came into being.

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Cosmetic brand names (CBNs) fall within the realm of scientific writing or pragmatic writing, which always lays stress on the function of the target text. Just as mentioned above, with an increasing number of imported and exported cosmetics, good translation of brand names of cosmetics is attracting more and more attention. Translators should take the characteristics of cosmetic consumers into consideration, finding out in what ways they are different from those consumers of other commodities. Translators should also make clear the functions of cosmetic names while considering how to translate and which translation strategies or approaches should be employed.

This paper aims to study the translation of cosmetic names teaching from the perspective of the functional translation theory, trying to find out some suitable translation strategies or approaches. Although it seems not to a new perspective, the author still attempts to work out the result of “new wine in old bottles”, hopefully the improved translations of cosmetic brand names can be helpful to the consumer, the manufacturer, the agent and the product itself.

### Functional Translation theory

Functional translation theory was originated in Germany in the 1970s. In terms of the weak points of linguistic school of translation, it has extensively absorbed some thoughts of communicative theory, action theory, information theory, discourse linguistics and aesthetics of reception. Its emergence makes the focus of translation research shift from the original text to the target text, thus becoming the most influential and the most active translation school in German. Functional translation theory emphasizes that translation is a kind of cultural change, intercourse interaction or a cross-cultural activity. It regards translation as a kind of complicated behavior with the participation of multi-professional people including the client, translator, and recipient. The most important thing about the German theory of functional translation is whether the translation target is fulfilled and whether the translation content is complete. Translation is a conduct with specific purpose. Integrity does not mean exactly the same, but means to express all the content of the source text to meet the needs of readers. At present, the functional translation theory has a complete theoretical system and translation model. The most important principle is the target function of the functional translation. Translation must achieve a specific purpose and have a certain practical effect, so as to help people understand and learn exotic culture better.

According to Skopos theory, the source text becomes an open entity with infinite possibilities, and the translation means is justified by the end, that is to say, Skopos determines the method used in translation; to make sure

that the target-text purpose is compatible with the original author's intentions, the loyalty principle is also added to Skopos theory.

There are totally three basic rules in Skopos theory, “the Skopos rule” by Vermeer, “the loyalty principle” and ‘the coherence rule’ promoted by Nord. In the following part, it will give a detailed introduction to these three basic rules.

### The Skopos rule

“Skopos rule” as the top-ranking rule for any translation, means translation is determined by its aims. Vermeer explains the rule as follow: Every text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. The Skopos rule thus read as follow: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enable your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. (Nord, 29) Vermeer makes clarification for it and puts argues that “what the Skopos states that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target text.” Though most translation actions have more than one purpose to achieve, they usually follow a hierarchical order. The translator, as a decision-maker, should know which particular purpose is the most important one to carry out in a translation process. The Skopos rule gives the translator a new perspective to decide which strategy will be employed in the whole process. (Nord, 2).

### The Coherence rule

Vermeer claims that any text is just an ‘offer of information’ from which each receiver selects the items they find interesting and important. (Nord, 31) What the translator can do, and should do, is to produce a text that is at least likely to be meaningful to target-culture receivers. In Vermeer's terms, the target text should confirm the standard of “inter textual coherence”. The coherence rule specifies that a translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers' situation. Being ‘coherent with’ is synonymous with being ‘part of the receivers' situation. (Nord, 32).

### The Fidelity rule

The Fidelity rule states the inter textual coherence between the target text and the source one, more specifically; the source text information received by the translator, the interpretation of this information made by the translator and the information that is encoded for the target text receives should be consistent with each other. Since a translation is an offer of information about a preceding offer of information, it is expected to bear some kind of

relationship with the corresponding source text. Vermeer calls this relationship 'inter textual coherence' or 'fidelity'. In the case of the Skopos rule, the important point is inter textual coherence should exist between source and target text, while the form it takes depends both on the translator's interpretation of the source text and the translation Skopos. This is postulated as a further principle, referred to as the text and the translation Skopos. This is postulated as a further principle, referred to the 'fidelity rule'. (Nord, 32) The Fifth item in Chapter One of the Translator's Charter, which was amended by International Federation of Translators on July 9 1994, went on like this: a faithful version of the source text does not mean a word-for-word literal translation. Fidelity of the translation should also be supplemented by some appropriate adjustments so that the form, atmosphere and deeper meaning of the source text can be reproduced in another language.

### On translation teaching of CBNs from the perspective of functional theories

According to the functional theory, the main determinant of the whole translation is the purpose of translation. The ultimate purpose of the brand name translation is to make the target language consumers like the products as the local do. The translation must meet the preferences of the target language consumer, even the pronunciation and meaning of the names need to be changed sometimes. The cosmetic brand names have many characteristics, which require the translator reflect the characteristics as much as possible.

The translation of the brand names should meet the following requirements: (1) distinguish the products between similar one; (2) create product image; (3) display the characteristics of products; (4) promote the products sales. In order to achieve this purpose, during the translation, two principles should be followed: one is to make the product as the center, to convey product information; another is the consumer-oriented, concerned about the target consumer psychology, pay attention to translation in the target language culture may produce related semantic and cultural connotations. On this basis, the translator should play their own creativity; flexibly use translation strategies to complete the translation work.

This part will discuss the translation of brand names from the perspective of functional translation theory.

### Translation principles in CBNs translation under Skopos theory

#### • Application of the Skopos rule

In view of the particularity of the brand names, as well as its propaganda and communication function, we can put aside

shackles of the brand phonology and meaning to translate. Such as Origins (品木宣言), a kind of natural cosmetic brand advocating nature "木" (mu) is the origin of plants. "源" is the Chinese meaning of "origin". "Origin" is a plant-based, science-based brand, provide the dual sense for both human skin and soul. This translation successfully put "木" and "源" together, "品" means enjoy, can be understood as enjoying the natural skin care with pleasure and healthy. If directly translate it according to its meaning "起源", it would be a boring brand. There also some similar examples, such as Make Up forever (浮生若梦), La Mer (海蓝之谜), and so on.

#### • Application of Coherence rule and Fidelity rule

##### Combination of Coherence rule and Fidelity rule:

The cosmetic brand names translation should be a combination of cultural and aesthetic. In the process of translation of cosmetic brand names, it is not too difficult if only faithful to transliteration. However, if we want to implement the coherence rule, we need to add the cultural characteristics of the target language to the translation, and accept the aesthetic evaluation of the target audience. Of course, it is not easy to connect the two rules together at any time.

France's well-known cosmetics Lancôme's translation is perfectly combining the two principles together. The pronunciation of "兰蔻" (lankou) and is similar with its English pronunciation. And "兰" in the Chinese culture is a kind of noble flower. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, "兰" became the theme of a lot of books, pictures and crafts. And "蔻" is easy to remind of "豆蔻年华" (young girl in glorious period). So the combination of these two words cleverly makes up the image of Lancôme and the product's effects. Its unique noble quality can make a woman keep their skin smooth and flexible as same as the girl's.

Another example is Swiss Balance (柏莉诗). Chinese people have always liked to name things by plants and flowers. "柏" and "莉" is easy to remind us of cypress and jasmine, these two plants symbolize strong and beautiful in traditional Chinese culture. Finally, at the end of a "诗", which means poetry in Chinese, combines the poetic plants "柏" and "莉" together. This translation is similar to the English pronunciation of the brand, but also in line with the Chinese aesthetic.

##### Obedience by Fidelity rule towards Coherence rule:

As mentioned earlier, it is not easy to be faithful and coherent at the same time in many cases. While under the guidance of functional theory, the purpose of translation is to regard translation as a text-based process which based on the original text. Under the guidance of this theory,

the translator can selectively retain or rewrite the content according to the purpose of the translation. So in this case, the translator can select extract information to translate.

Such as France’s luxury cosmetic brand Guerlain (娇兰) Guerlain is the name of his founder. Most of the brand name translations are transliteration. But Guerlain’s first “Jiao” and “Guerlain” the first syllable pronunciation is clearly inconsistent. “Jiao” in the Chinese means beautiful and delicate. And “lan” as mentioned above, is the symbols noble. Some people think that Dior, Chanel are in the nobility level, and then Guerlain should be the royal level. The combination of the two words perfectly expresses the elegant and luxury style of the brand.

Another example is the German cosmetic brand “Best Care”, if it was translated directly as “最好的关怀”, it becomes lengthy. So remove “care”, just take Best for transliteration for “碧斯”, both simple and beautiful.

### Main strategies to the translation of CBNs

- **Transliteration**

Transliteration means translating text according to the original pronunciation, and using the words with similar pronunciation as a translation. Because the English and Chinese writing systems has a great difference in the pronunciation, and many brand names do not have real meaning, so transliteration is the most suitable method. Using the transliteration method has great advantages. (1) preserve the beauty of the original brand name; (2) reflect the exotic or authentic characteristics of the commodity; (3) cater to the psychology of the consumers who advocate the foreign brand; (4) increase the added value of the goods.

Here are examples of the names of trade names translated by transliteration from both English to Chinese translations and Chinese to English translations.

#### English - Chinese translation:

Table 1.Examples of E-C Translation

English brand name	Chinese translation
Pond’s	旁氏
Sassoon	沙宣
Chanel	香奈儿
Anna Sui	安娜苏
Mary Kay	玫琳凯

#### Chinese - English translation:

Many Chinese brand names are also translated by using

some English words that have similar pronunciation to the original name, or by creating some new words according to their original pronunciation. This translation can be accepted by more foreign consumers, and be easier to remember. Here are the relevant examples.

Table 2.Examples of C-E Translation

Chinese brand name	English translation
羽西	Yue--Sai
索芙特	Softto

Chinese has its own phonetic system to help people to remember the pronunciation. Many Chinese brand names are also translated by phonetic alphabet. This method can retain the original name of the characteristics. Some of the Chinese brand names translated by Pinyin have become world famous brands with Chinese characteristics.

Table 3.Examples of C-E Translation

Chinese brand name	English translation
六神	Liushen
大宝	Dabao

- **Direct translation**

Direct translation refers to the translation of the brand names by means of text rather than pronunciation. When the name of the brand name has the same meaning in target language culture, the direct translation is a good choice. The advantage of direct translation is that it can achieve the unity of the original text and the translation.

Here are the examples:

#### English-Chinese translation:

Table 4.Examples of E-C Translation

English brand name	Chinese translation
Red Earth	红地球
Fair Lady	贵夫人
Cover Girl	封面女郎

#### Chinese - English translation:

Chinese brand name has a characteristic, that is, many of the traditional brand names are taken from plants or animals, most of these names are with a good meaning, indicating the Chinese people’s aesthetic preferences. By translating them directly, we can preserve the original meaning well. For example, “蜂花” is a bee plus beautiful

flower, it corresponds to the English "bee & flower". This kind of translation can still retain its good connotation meaning. "蜂花" brand translation is "bee & flower".

**Table 5.Examples of C-E Translation**

Chinese brand name	English translation
李医生	Dr.Li

#### • Re-Creation translation

Functional translation theory holds that the source language in translation is only a way of providing information. In the process of translation, the translator can choose the information items that they think are valid in the source language, and then translate them through appropriate words in target language. In order to achieve the purpose of conveying the name of the brand, the translator can give full play to his own creativity when translating the brand name. Therefore, the translator can use the innovation method to translate.

Innovation refers to the translation of a word or a name into another language, not based on the original meaning or pronunciation. This translation is based on the target language-oriented, to make full use of the target language, to meet the needs of target consumers. Re-creation has become the common method of English translation of brand names. More and more companies are aware of the different naming of English and Chinese brands. When an English brand name does not have a special meaning or cannot be found in the Chinese language with the original English pronunciation of words, the using of re-creation is a good choice.

For example, "Revlon" Chinese translation is "露华浓". This translation does not simply combine several Chinese characters together. In fact, it is cited from the Chinese poet Li Bai's "Qingping tune three" in the "云想衣裳花想容, 春风拂槛露华浓". This sentence describes the ancient beauty of women on behalf of Yang Guifei. This translation not only embodies the properties of cosmetics, but also to achieve the brand name of the communicative purposes. This is derived from the Chinese ancient poetry of the brand name added to the original English name is not elegant temperament. Here are a few examples.

**Table 6.Examples of C-E Translation**

Chinese brand name	English translation
丁家宜	TJOY
佳雪	Cathy
美加净	Maxam
自然堂	Chando

丸美	Marubi
佰草集	Herborist

#### • Combination of transliteration and free translation

The purpose of combination of transliteration and free translation is to find translations that are related to the original text both in pronunciation and semantics. When translating names, the pronunciation of both languages should be similar to bring the target consumer on the positive association. The literal translation focuses on the transmission of the original product name embodied in the product characteristics and other related information. This method is more difficult, it need to be with a sense of rhythm and to meet the purpose of the reader's pronunciation habits in terms of pronunciation, and in terms of meaning, it also need to meet the cultural characteristics of the target language and reflect the characteristics of the product.

In short, if the translation can be as much as possible to reflect the original brand name according to the pronunciation and meaning, it is in line with the principles of functional translation theory.

These are the examples:

#### English-Chinese translation:

**Table 7.Examples of E-C Translation**

English brand name	Chinese translation
Biore	碧柔
SLEK	舒蕾
Avon	雅芳
Maybelline	美宝莲
Nivea	妮维雅
L'Oréal	欧莱雅
Johnson's	强生
Lux	力士
PORTS	宝姿
Clean Clear	可伶可俐
Pure&Mild	泊美

In the process of translating, the pronunciation is the primary consideration, but the meaning is more important because the Chinese brand name is more meaningful. We need to find some words similar to the original pronunciation, and

the meaning of such a Chinese word need to be relevant with the product category.

### Chinese - English translation:

With the globalization of the market, this method is more and more widely used in Chinese-English translation of brand names, especially when English can find words or expressions similar to Chinese in pronunciation and meaning. In the international market, in order to meet the preferences of Western consumers, the translation of the pronunciation need to be Europeanized, which makes it easy to pronounce and makes these translations more similar to the English brand, more conducive to sales and memory.

Table 8. Examples of C-E Translation

Chinese brand name	English translation
雅倩	Arche
雅嘉	Aikai

### Conclusion

In this paper, the author conducts the research to explore the practical translation strategies of cosmetic brand names in the light of functional theory. A basically qualitative, with descriptive and analytical methods is employed to analyze more than 100 cosmetic brand names collected by the author. It is sincerely hoped that the paper could be of any help to the future teaching in this field.

Brand names are relatively complex and contain a large number of principles and factors to consider, only in the language or cultural, but also in the brand and market strategy, aesthetics and legal requirements. Qualified translators also need to equip with knowledge of market psychology, aesthetics, culture, law, and so on. The translation of the brand name is a very important step for the product and the enterprise to enter the new market. When translating the brand name, the translator also should proceed from the purpose and characteristics of the brand, take the product as the center and the consumer as target, and use a flexible translation strategy. In addition to methods mentioned in this article, the translator can use other more effective translation methods as long as they meet the requirements of functional translation theory.

To sum up, the application of functional translation theories, Skopos theory in particular, gives translators much more room for creativity which is the soul of brand name translation. Nevertheless, it is after all the realization of commercial aims that decides the final translated version.

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