

# Creativity in Translation: A Study on Apple's English-Chinese Advertising Translation based on Communicative Translation Approach

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**Abstract:** With a focus on creativity, this study investigates the translation of Apple's English-to-Chinese advertisements in light of Peter Newmark's Communicative Translation approach. Detailed analysis reveals that Apple's creative use of translation techniques such as idioms, puns, and network catchphrases, instead of literal translation, effectively produces an equivalent effect on the target audience. This research highlights the significance of creativity in tech product advertising translation, offering insights for advertisers seeking to create compelling and engaging translations.

**Keywords:** Creativity, Tech Product Advertising Translation, Apple's Advertising, Communicative Translation.

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## 1. Introduction

The competition between multinational technology corporations like Apple and Huawei is escalating due to the global economy. To boost sales in the overseas market, those technology corporations place more emphasis on advertising. Successful advertisements typically feature vivid and creative expressions that capture potential customers' attention and persuade them to purchase. To reproduce these effects in the translated version, the translator should carefully select the appropriate techniques.

This study focuses on the creative translation of tech product advertisements, an area that has received little academic attention. In light of the Communicative Translation approach put forward by Peter Newmark (1981), this study aims to provide insights into the creative translation of tech product advertisements by analyzing examples from Apple, the world's largest technology company by market capitalization, which enjoys popularity in China with its creative advertisements. This study can help encourage creativity and effectiveness in translating tech product advertisements to promote brands' global marketing.

## 2. Challenges in Creative Translation of Tech Product Advertisements

Tech goods refer to technology-powered products such as smartphones, smart home appliances, App&Web services, etc. As Goldman (1982: 81) states, technology products are "characterized by a 'short' product life cycle" due to technology's rapid upgrading. Instead of merely creating a slogan, information about new functions or technologies should be highlighted. However, technical terms or functional details are often tedious and challenging to comprehend and translate creatively. Therefore, it is difficult to creatively introduce the distinctive functions of tech goods without tedium and confusion.

The constraint on length also presents a challenge to creativity. Varan et al. (2020: 54) suggest that brief advertisements can efficiently convey effectiveness, as "commercial length has diminishing returns". People are exposed to numerous commercials daily, and each ad

typically remains in their minds for only a few seconds. Therefore, translations of tech product advertisements should be concise and memorable. Infusing creativity into a brief sentence poses a challenge for translators.

Furthermore, the translator may struggle to devise inventive ways to tailor the translated version to specific cultural settings. Language serves as the carrier of culture, and creative expression in one cultural context may lose its effectiveness in another. Munday (2004: 209) emphasizes that translating advertising involves not only the text but also the cultural context. Ghentulescu (2018: 103) asserts that when launching a new campaign in a particular nation, one of the most common considerations is the cultural impact of advertising, and "commercials should be tailored to suit them". Therefore, the translator must craft translations specifically for the context of the target culture, which can pose challenges for creative translation.

## 3. Theoretical Background

### 3.1. Transcreation and Equivalent Effect

The creative translation of an advertisement can be considered a transcreation process. Transcreation makes the advertising text more engaging while respecting the brand identity. In creative advertising, transcreation stands out as a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common. Since the transcreation of advertising is often valued from a practical perspective, there are no widely acknowledged academic approaches for transcreation yet. However, some translation approaches in the field of Translation Studies can provide inspiration and be considered as approaches to transcreation.

Some functionalist approaches in the Translation Studies realm can be regarded as transcreation as they consider the equivalent effect as the core. The principle of equivalent effect shifts the focus of translation from code-switching to the response of readers, which provides more freedom for creativity in the translation process.

Pedersen (2014: 59) states that "the idea of same or equivalent effect is a factor much valued in transcreation" and "these translation approaches could be considered as approaches to transcreation". A successful translation should

provide the same effect that the source material sought to achieve (Eco 2001: 44). While many functionalist approaches explain the concept of equivalent effect, the Communicative Translation approach proposed by Newmark is particularly instructive for advertising translation. This is because it helps identify the text type of advertisements and suggests the appropriate translation approach, which will be discussed in the following section.

### 3.2. Communicative Translation Approach

According to Newmark (1988: 41), there are three main text types: expressive text, informative text and vocative text. The vocative text, such as publicity and propaganda, emphasizes the readership and tries to make them respond in the intended way of source text. Due to the reason that commercials assign great importance to the response of readers, they can be classified into the vocative-text type but still have features of the other text types. Since Newmark (1988: 42) states that “only few texts are purely expressive, informative or vocative”, and most texts combine all three text-type features, with an emphasis on one.

Newmark (1981) puts forward Communicative Translation approach in his work *Approaches to Translation*, and he claims that it is suitable for the vocative text type such as advertising. Communicative Translation attempts to achieve the equivalent effect, which means “to produce on its readership an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readership of the original” (Newmark 1981: 39). Equivalent effect, which is also called the “equivalent response principle”, is the criterion by which the value of persuasive writing is to be assessed (Newmark 1981: 39). Communicative Translation is a receptor-oriented approach and concentrates on the readers’ response and acceptance. By adopting Communicative Translation, the translator is endowed with freedom to choose proper translation techniques beyond literal translation, so as to smooth communication between the writer and reader as well as foster creativity.

## 4. Creative Translation Techniques of Apple’s Advertisement based on Communicative Translation Approach

### 4.1. Adopting Chinese Idioms

Chinese idioms, also known as Chengyu, are a crucial component of the Chinese language. Most Chinese idioms consist of four characters and carry rich meanings. Apple’s advertising often incorporates Chinese idiomatic phrases because they can achieve an equivalent effect without being redundant. Additionally, compared to a literal translation, the proper use of Chinese idioms can make an advertisement more creative, memorable, and appealing. Here is an example:

Example:

AirPods Max

Source Text: Introducing AirPods Max - a perfect balance of exhilarating high-fidelity audio and the effortless magic of AirPods.

Target Text: AirPods Max 高调登场。它唱作俱佳，既有高保真音质的拿手好戏，又继承了 AirPods 的种种精妙。

Back Translation: Here comes the AirPods Max, appearing on the scene with high profile. It is a multi-talented star who is not only an expert in high-fidelity audio but also inherits all

the strengths of AirPods.

In the official Chinese version, there are some idioms: “高调登场” (BT: to appear on the scene with high profile), “唱作俱佳” (BT: a versatile singer who is good at singing and writing lyrics; someone who is multi-talented) and “拿手好戏” (BT: something in which one is an expert). By adopting Chinese idiomatic expressions, the TT can convey much information in fewer words since the BT is obviously much longer than the ST. Besides, here AirPods Max is being compared to a talented star since these idioms are generally used to describe famous people. In this way, Apple creatively highlights the features of the AirPods Max and considers length constraints and cultural context, successfully achieving an equivalent effect and leaving a lasting impression on the audience.

### 4.2. Adopting Pun

As a rhetorical device, a pun utilizes phonetic or semantic similarities to convey implicit meanings. In advertisement translation, puns can help convey multiple meanings or associations, making the message more engaging. They effectively capture the audience’s attention by leveraging linguistic creativity and cultural references, enhancing the impact of the advertisement. Puns are frequently seen in Apple’s advertisements. Here are two examples:

Example:

iPhone 12

ST: Oops resistant.

TT: 专治水逆，防溅抗水更潇洒。

BT: No fear of bad luck, splash-proof and water-resistant.

When people in English-speaking countries accidentally have something terrible happen to them, like spilling coffee on their phone, they may shout “Oops”. In the Chinese culture context, “Oops” sounds strange. The closest Chinese equivalent word might be “啊(Ahhh)”, but it doesn’t capture the effect of creativity involved in “Oops”. Therefore, considering the Chinese cultural context, Apple translated “Oops” into “水逆”, which literally means falling into the water. It can be reminiscent of the accident of dropping a mobile phone into the water. “水逆” is also a popular expression that means “have bad luck, be out of luck, fall on evil days”. By using the phrase “专治水逆”, Apple not only highlights its waterproof technology but also reassures people that they don’t have to worry about bad luck if they use the iPhone 12. In summary, this creative pun captures the distinctive functions of the iPhone 12 while also appealing to Chinese cultural sensibilities. The intended effects of the source text are successfully conveyed to the target audience.

Example:

iPad Air M2

ST: iPad Air. Fresh Air.

TT: iPad Air, 好轻新。

BT: iPad Air. So new and light.

The phrase “Fresh Air” in the ST serves as a pun, which not only emphasizes that it is a fresh model but also suggests that the product brings a lightweight experience akin to air. However, directly translating this as “新鲜空气” or “全新 Air” in Chinese would not convey the engaging effect of this pun to the target audience. In order to maintain the ingenuity of the original advertisement, apple skillfully incorporated a pun in the Chinese translation as well. In the TT, the term “好轻新” combines the characters for “light(轻)” and “new(新)” to

play on the similarity in sound to “清新(fresh)”, effectively conveying the idea that the iPad Air is both lightweight and offers a fresh, new experience. This use of puns in advertising achieves an equivalent effect and adds a creative element to the message, making it more engaging and appealing to the audience.

### 4.3. Adopting Network Catchphrases

Network catchphrases are popular expressions that spread widely. According to Hou (2007: 50), they are not just linguistic phenomena; they also reflect social reality and, from the perspective of cultural psychology, reveal people's values. With vivid and metaphorical meanings, network catchphrases usually attract people's attention and stimulate a wide range of discussions. Apple often incorporates network catchphrases into their advertisements because technology products are generally targeted at young people who regularly use the internet and are quite familiar with these phrases. Here are two examples:

iPad 10

ST: Stay in frame. Get in touch.

TT: C位出镜, 各位常联系。

BT: Play a central role in the debut when you get in touch with friends on the iPad.

The ST introduces Apple's face-following function, which automatically moves the camera to keep the user's face in the center of the screen. The literal translation of “stay in frame” is “呆在框架里”, which could be difficult for Chinese audience to understand and fail to convey the effect close to what the original audience obtained. “C位出镜”(BT: play a central role in debut) is a network catchphrase which is quite trendy in China due to the popularity of talent shows. In a talent show, the one who stands out often play a central role in the debut. By saying someone is “C位出镜” in an online chat on the iPad, Apple successfully achieves an equivalent effect. This not only creatively highlights the iPad's face-tracking function in a concise manner but also integrates into Chinese pop culture.

iPhone 15 Pro

ST: All-new Action button. What will yours do?

TT: 全新操作按钮, 就等你的神操作。

BT: All-new Action button, just waiting for your impressive moves.

The ST for the iPhone 15 Pro, “All-new Action button. What will yours do?” introduces a new customizable button feature, which provides quick access to frequently used functions like the camera and flashlight. A literal translation of “What will yours do?” as “你的会做什么?” fails to convey the intended effect and potential for creativity. The TT, “全新操作按钮, 就等你的神操作” uses the Chinese network catchphrase “神操作” (BT: impressive moves), a term often used to describe skillful actions, particularly in gaming and

online culture. By using “神操作”, Apple achieves an equivalent effect, creatively emphasizing the customizable and innovative nature of the Action button while resonating with contemporary Chinese cultural references. This approach makes the advertisement more engaging and relevant to the target audience.

## 5. Conclusion

In light of the Communicative Translation approach, this study explores the creative translation of tech product advertisements, with a particular focus on Apple's advertising. By adopting the Communicative Translation approach, translators are given more freedom to select appropriate translation techniques rather than adhering strictly to literal translation. Through detailed analysis, it can be concluded that the use of Chinese idioms, puns, and network catchphrases allows Apple to creatively produce an equivalent effect on the Chinese audience with expressive and captivating language. This paper contributes to the field of tech product advertisement translation by providing inspiration for advertisers to create appealing and creative translations. However, this study primarily concentrates on text, leaving the multi-modality in advertisements unexplored, which could be a focus for future research.

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