

Intersemiotic Translation and Ideology: the Re-presentation of the Narrative of Women as Sexual Predators in Printed Advertising Aimed at Women

Alba Páez Rodríguez

Irene Rodríguez Arcos

Department of Translation and Interpreting
University of Salamanca
Spain

Abstract

In the era of globalisation, international brands increasingly launch advertising campaigns designed to work in different countries. In this context, the translator reveals him/herself as a key element in the adaptation of these advertisements to different audiences. Up to now translation literature has approached the linguistic aspects of advertising translation but has paid virtually no attention to the semiotic ones. By analysing one of these international campaigns, specifically the Oh, Lola! Campaign starring Dakota Fanning and launched by Marc Jacobs in 2011, this paper demonstrates the urgent need for research into the semiotic aspects of advertising translation, since in this textual genre every single element conveys an intended meaning. Besides, it aims at denaturalising the narrative of the woman as a sexual predator that nowadays abounds in western printed advertising aimed at women. In this sense, it seeks to emphasise the power and danger of discourses and their key role in shaping social constructions.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, advertising, woman, ideology, narrative, symbolic violence, ethics

A dominant ideology typically owes its success not to brute power and conscious imposition, but to the ability to convince people that it is not in fact a matter of ideology at all, but simply natural, “the way things are”. Eckert & McConnel-Ginet (2013/2003, p. 29).

Objective discourse does not exist: all things are re-presentations, narratives, discourses, myths in which we grow. Vidal (2007, p. 71)¹.

1. Introduction: Advertising as a Globalised/Globalising Discourse

At the dawn of the 21st century and as a consequence of the extensive developments of the past few decades in the field of information and communication technologies, the known world has been transformed irrevocably with the alteration of the most solid categories on which it was supported, namely time and space. In this new reality, these have been compressed (Harvey, 1992/1990; Cf. the concept of “instantaneous time” in Lash & Urry, 1994 and Urry, 1998) and relations between different places in the world have been intensified, to the point where interaction between social systems that had been independent and distant up to now is increasingly significant for the life of the inhabitants² of this “global village”, to quote McLuhan and Powers (1989), or this “global network of individual cottages” as Castells (2005, p. 141) described it³.

¹ Our translation.

² In this sense, the concept of “time-space distancing” coined by Anthony Giddens (1991) in the field of sociology perfectly reflects the profound change experienced by social relations with the advent of modernity which “increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction” (p. 18).

³ It should be noted that with the expression “global network of individual cottages” Manuel Castells refuses the idea of homogeneity which he considers to be implicit in McLuhan’s term. Indeed, for the Spanish sociologist networks impose both forced globalisation and individualisation.

In short, this is a new global context characterised by networks (Castells, 2010/1996), flows (Appadurai, 1996, 1990; Lash & Urry, 1994), and the mobility of elements of all kinds, from goods, capitals, technologies, information, people and cultures to the discourses, ideologies, stories and narratives implied by the former.

In this regard we consider that the use of the word “globalisation” to denote the current situation of the connection and interdependency of world markets, societies and cultures contributes with its second order significations (Barthes, 1972/1957) to transmit to us, although we may not perceive it, the idea of a planet in which everything moves in all directions between all points within it. In this way, the melodious chords of inclusion and universality which this tag involves hide the fact that this international traffic is produced invariably in a unidirectional and asymmetric manner. With its noises (Vidal, 2013, 2012) and its aromas (Grijelmo, 2009/2000), this term embellishes the reality of a monopolar world which finds itself totally immersed in an “unequal globalisation”, to quote Vidal (2010, p. 80), “in which the homogenising bias is that imposed by world powers” (*Id.*)⁴; in which the cultural, discursive and ideological stream flows mainly from the West to the world, and more specifically from the Anglo-American orbit to the world⁵.

The advertising discourses which constitute the subject of study of this paper are a clear example of this “global cultural imperialism” (Elliott & Lemert, 2014, p. 411) which reigns today in our societies and through which western values and ideologies are disseminated and imposed —mainly through the media— to the rest of the planet. Identified as “global”, “international”, “globalising” or “standardising” depending on the author, these advertisements and campaigns are defined as those conceived to work on every (or almost every) market in which a certain company is present (*Cf.* Corbacho, 2010; Duro, 2001; Montes, 2006; Valdés, 2004). Nowadays this type of advertising is used with increasing frequency (*Cf.* Bassat, 1999) and represents an essential tool for a large number of multinationals, since it allows them to target their products at a transnational group of purchasers with identical consumption habits. In addition, according to Corbacho (2010) these international advertisements have other advantages for big companies because they allow them to reduce costs, to avoid the confusion caused by several messages, to create a strong international image, and to increase communicative efficacy.

It is precisely the ability of this type of advertising to create and disseminate the same message on a global scale that concerns us here, since we consider that “discourses, including the discourse of advertising, are not only representational (socially constituted), but also socially constitutive” (Pawelczyk, 2008, p. 314) and therefore that narratives (Baker, 2006) crafted by them will have an effect on the (in this case multiple) societies which receive them. From this perspective, the ethical dimension of the work carried out by the advertising translator, the true architect who allows “la grande poésie populaire” (Grünig, 1990) to overcome linguistic and cultural boundaries successfully, becomes crucial. In this respect we have found that, despite its relevance, research into Translation Studies including this ethical dimension as a subject of study is scanty, so we aim to highlight and mitigate this scarcity with this paper.

2. Objectives and Methodology

In the following pages we intend to achieve a double objective. Firstly, we aim to reveal the urgent need for research into advertising translation — which has been traditionally limited to descriptive studies on techniques, typologies, and strategies —, so that it can include a reflection on power and ideology which go hand in hand with translation decisions. In fact we agree with Meschonnic that what counts “is no longer what a text⁶ says, but what it does. Its power, no longer merely meaning” (2011/2009, p. 85). In this regard we wish to draw attention to the importance of advertising translators being aware that the decisions adopted during their work involve significant consequences which can contribute to the re-creation and dissemination of certain narratives which, like that in the campaign analysed below, may turn out to be detrimental for certain social constructions.

⁴ Our translation.

⁵ In this regard it should be stressed that according to Elliott and Lemert “what people call ‘globalization’ has many different meanings — not all of them coherent, few reconcilable” (2014, p. 385). In these pages we share the perspective of those who perceive the aforementioned process “as a central driver in the export of American commerce and culture, of the vast spread of mass consumerism, of the unleashing of US controlled turbo-capitalism” (*Id.*).

⁶ According to Yuste Frías (2006), who applies it to the translation of children’s books, we consider that in the field of advertising translation text is image and image is text. From this perspective we conceive advertisements as a hybrid icon-textual entity, and we understand as “text” both linguistic and visual elements as well as both of them put together.

In other words, our goal is for those professionals to recognise themselves as active subjects in the re-elaboration of certain discourses and, therefore as co-responsible agents of the message they contribute towards producing and spreading. In this sense we agree with Baker that no translator or interpreter “can escape responsibility for the narratives they elaborate and promote through their translation and interpreting work” (2006, p. 26).

Secondly, with the present paper we aim to insist on what we consider to be the unavoidable need to contribute to the scanty research which includes intersemiotic translation as a subject of study, a notion which is essential in the professional subfield discussed here. Through the analysis presented in the following pages, we will prove that a good advertising translator must be primarily an expert at disentangling messages, ideology and therefore power filtered through the use of both linguistic and non linguistic signs, namely colours, postures, size, perspective, the protagonist, language⁷, and more besides.

With these purposes we will analyse in the following pages the campaign entitled *Oh, Lola!*, which is included in the typology of the global advertisements previously described and which was launched at an international level by the fashion company Marc Jacobs. The goal we intend to achieve consists of denaturalising the apparently neutral and innocent use of the semiotic machinery in the different images which form the campaign; a semiotic disassembly which all translators must carry out when facing a project of this type in order to do their job ethically⁸. On the other hand, the reason why we have decided to study precisely this campaign and not another lies in the narrative itself, which contributes to the re-construction and re-presentation of the woman as a sexual predator. In this regard, we consider peremptory the contribution to the denaturalisation of one of the most widespread images in advertising today and which therefore exerts more power over women. As we will try to prove, this re-presentation covers with a veneer of liberation a narrative which continues to be one of domination. In this sense, this paper aims to create a social effect when denouncing the danger entailed by the fact that this symbolic domination is now disguised, and also to insist on the incommensurable power of this discourse, which is today stronger than ever.

To carry out the proposed analysis, we will use an interdisciplinary methodology which combines contributions from four different epistemological fields, which turn out to be closely connected. Thus, on the one hand we resort to descriptive Translation Studies, which give us the concepts of “ideology”, “power” and “discourse”, the latter two being understood in the Foucaultian sense (Foucault, 1978, 1971/1970), and “narratives” (Baker, 2006), which will allow us to approach our subject of study with critical thinking. On the other hand, we will adopt some notions from sociology, especially Pierre Bourdieu’s theories that have recently been incorporated into Translation Studies, where their usefulness has already been proven (Cf. Diaz & Monzó, 2010; Inghilleri, 2005; Wolf & Fukari, 2007). In particular, we will include in our study the concepts of “symbolic capital” and “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1995/1982, 2001/1998), which will help us to understand what these advertisements do, why they resort to certain signs and not to others to construct the desired narrative, and which reasons explain their success. Furthermore, in our analysis we will apply notions from the field of semiotics, namely those from Barthes’s theories such as “myth”, “naturalisation” and “first and second order significations” (1972/ 1957). Finally, as could hardly be otherwise, our study will be based on the research to date on the so-called “women and media” field. Once the parameters of our study have been established, we will start by plunging into this swampy terrain that is the advertising re-presentation of women.

⁷ The issue of the use of language as a sign in advertising has been approached from different fields (Cf. Kuppens, 2010; Piller, 2001; Vellón, 2009). In Translation Studies, scant attention has been paid to this subject (Páez, 2013), so we consider that it is urgent to undertake further research.

⁸ Since the cultural shift experienced in the 1990s, the ethical dimension of the task of translation has come to the fore in research into Translation Studies. This subject is both important and sensitive and, like the translation concept itself, escapes all definition. In this regard we consider that there are as many definitions of ethical translations as translators. For some authors such as Baker, the ethical dimension of the translation depends directly on the ethical level of the narratives we help perpetuate through our work. Indeed, she believes that “as social actors, translators and interpreters are responsible for the narratives they help circulate, and for the real-life consequences of giving these narratives currency and legitimacy” (2006, p. 139). On the contrary, some only consider those translations produced in accordance with the client’s criteria to be ethical, without taking into account at any time the possible consequences. Although our notion of ethical translation matches the first mentioned here, we will defend in the following pages a kind of “minimum ethical standards”; according to which an ethical translation would be one in which the decisions have been made with full awareness of everything at stake, in other words in which the translator has been able to perceive not only what a text says, but also what it *does*, which powers take part in it, and to which ideologies it corresponds and has acted in consequence.

3. Women, Advertising and Re-Presentation

For some decades, in parallel with the global expansion of the media we have been witnessing a genuine proliferation of research which, from epistemological fields as different as sociology, sciences of information, cultural studies, and marketing — to which Translation Studies have been recently added —, highlights an urgent need for analysing the images constantly created and disseminated by the media. These studies, which have deep roots in analytical and post-structuralist philosophy and narrative theory, and which taught us, according to Vidal (2007, p. 72), that reality is everything which comes to us re-presented through signs of any nature, reveal the falsity of the traditional conception of the media as a mirror (of society, events, etc.), as well as the dangers involved on hiding the fact that the media are and act as active shapers of perceptions and ideas (Sarikakis, 2013, p. 6); as elements which, in short, exert an enormous influence on the social system which is at the same time convoluted and subtle.

This approach, which precisely considers that the media have nowadays an incommensurable power to create reality at will⁹, is the one adopted in the present paper, in which we deal with the re-presentation of women in a very specific media type: advertising. In this regard, it should be noted that social, political and academic recognition of the incommensurable power which these re-presentations exert on the symbolic construction of women can currently be perceived in the fact that the number of epistemological fields which are studying it are increasing, as well as the institutions including this issue on their agendas¹⁰ or citizen initiatives that emerge to raise awareness of the dangers¹¹ involved.

The link between women and advertising has been especially strong since the origins of this communication and persuasion tool. In fact, the extremely low figures of female presence observed in the field of information¹² are inverted in advertising, where there is a glut of women (Gallego, 2013). This is due together with other factors to the major role which has been (and still is) played by women in the acquisition of products as consumers, buyers and inciters to consumption (Del Moral, 2000; Gallego, 2013). Their re-presentation in this sphere is therefore particularly relevant. In general terms it has been observed that advertising has traditionally contributed to shaping a stereotyped image of both men and women. However, the stereotypes linked to each gender are far from being equally detrimental; while he has been associated with activity, aggressiveness, reason, initiative, decision-making, etc., she has been related to submission, obedience, passivity, intuition and sensitiveness, among others (Del Moral, 2000, p. 212). The expert is set against the housewife or angel of the home, the innovative man versus the beautiful woman, the active subject versus the patient one.

This tendency has been slightly modified in recent years according to some studies which emphasise that advertising discourse has evolved in a positive way, albeit uneasily, as far as the re-presentation of gender identities is concerned (Del Moral, 2000; Feliu & Fernández, 2009; Gallego, 2013), so it fluctuates today between innovation and permanence (Gallego, 2013). In this regard, despite the fact that nowadays a great number of advertisements re-present women in the public and professional sphere in roles which were traditionally denied them, we agree with Del Moral (2000) that the political, economical and social goals achieved by women are generally reflected with some delay. Besides, it should be noted that we have recently witnessed the birth of new stereotyped women models which, disguised as liberated and progressive beings, exert as negative an influence on the concept of women living in the collective unconscious as traditional ones.

⁹ Baudrillard's work (2012/1991) represents the epitome of this perspective. For the French author, with the rise of a mediated society reality has disappeared to give way to a "hyperreality" in which what is real is not what can be reproduced, but what is reproduced. In this regard, Eco's works *Apocalypse Postponed* (1994/1964) and *Travels in Hyperreality* (1986/1973) are of particular interest.

¹⁰ A good example of institutional recognition of the need to control the image of women transmitted by advertising is the existence since 1994 of the Spanish Observatory of the Image of Women (the former Observatory of Sexist Advertising) which depends on the Institute for Women's Affairs and the Spanish Government. Its activities and initiatives can be consulted here: <http://www.inmujer.gob.es/observatorios/observImg/home.htm> (Last access: 17th May 2015).

¹¹ *Orbita Diversa* is an online blog that is also a good example of these initiatives. Available at: <https://orbitadiversa.wordpress.com/> (Last access: 17th May 2015).

¹² In this sense, Juana Gallego's work *De reinas a ciudadanas. Medios de comunicación, ¿motor o rémora para la igualdad?* [From Queens to Citizens. The Media: a Driver of or Obstacle to Equality?] gives an interesting quantitative and qualitative analysis of the current treatment of women in the Spanish media.

Among others we are referring to the superwoman, who works for a living and also takes care of the housework and her children without sacrificing a single second of the time she needs to be always beautiful, fit and trendy. Or the other one which we will deal with here, the sexually liberated woman, the main character of a significant percentage of the advertisements released in this increasingly sexualised culture (Papadopoulos, 2010), which has recently been described as “raunch culture” (Levy, 2006), or obscene culture to put it differently. A woman who far from representing the achievement of one of the main goals of second-wave feminism reflects a distortion of it. A disfigurement which, as Hermes (2011) reveals is the work of the commercial media, which have “ingrained” in us the idea that if someone is sexy and publicly shows his/her sexuality and a naked body this will bring freedom and independence. In the following pages we will attempt to prove that the sexualisation to which the image of women is submitted constitutes, as this author warns (*Ibid.*, p. 23), a disciplinary system in Foucault’s sense of the term. This is an action revealed to us as crucial if we consider that, as we previously noted, the advertising discourse also (or above all) has a socialising function (*Cf.* De Andrés, 2007; Del Moral, 2000; Feliu, 2009; Feliu & Fernández, 2009; Gallego, 2013; Pawelczyk, 2008; Piller, 2001). In other words, not only — or even mainly — does it inform of the characteristics of products and services, but it also participates in the perpetuation of values, behavioural patterns, and social models (Feliu & Fernández, 2009) and offers the public in general lifestyles and attitudes (Del Moral, 2000).

3.1. The Narrative of Women as Sexual Predators in Modern Advertising

In recent years the image of men and women disseminated through the various mechanisms of popular culture such as music, cinema, fashion shows, or the media has experienced a progressive sexualisation to the extent that nowadays authors such as Natasha Walter (2010) describe our culture as a “hypersexual” one. However, this sexualisation of both genders shows quantitative and qualitative differences, the woman being an attribute, the observed object par excellence (Gallego, 2013), the worst off. Nowadays it suffices to open a magazine, turn on the television, surf the Internet, or go out into the street to be bombarded with hyper-erotized images of the female gender. These are re-presentations with a level of explicitness that has reached its zenith and in which sex, shown from a perspective of male dominance and possession, and rape culture have been trivialised to the point of having become acceptable and even desirable (Wolf, 2002/1991), and overall and most dangerously, also natural (Barthes, 1972/1957).

In this context, in recent decades we have witnessed the birth of a new female stereotype whose presence and strength is increasing: the woman as a sexual predator. Disguised as sexual liberation, this narrative continues to construct the woman symbolically as an object of desire for men, with the nuance that it is done in a perverse and subtle way: by creating the feeling that it is her who has the power. One of the most important aesthetic trends in the marketing of the construction of this re-presentation of the female sex is doubtless “porn chic”, defined as that advertising usually related to cosmetic and fashion brands which is developed within the parameters of pornographic imagery (Díaz & Pimentel, 2002). As these authors point out, the type of adverts classified under this tag tends to show images of sadomasochism and zoophilia, women re-presented as animals or accompanied by them, lesbian scenes and some clearly insinuating group sex¹³. In order to do so they use complex semiotic machinery which encompasses from pornographic postures of vulnerability and sexual invitation to the outfit, the make-up, the scenery, the gestures, the gazes, and much more, with all of this in a heady atmosphere of elegance and sophistication (Fernández Martín, 2012; Gallego, 2013). Examples of this are legion and so are the brands that use this advertising strategy: Tom Ford, Sisley, Gucci, Menswear, American Apparel, Calvin Klein, Dolce & Gabbana, etc.¹⁴

¹³ Equally, these authors mention as other typical re-presentations of porn chic advertising those in which the woman is immersed in a scene of abuse, rape or accident, as well as images in which the most personal features of the woman are eliminated, for example by hiding her face to make her merely a sex object or by costumes or make-up that transform her into a doll, a toy, or a machine. In this regard the *Orbita Diversa* blog provides an interesting list of advertising campaigns which construct and disseminate the narratives of male domination, possession, violence, abuse and reification that concern us in the present paper. Available at: <http://orbitadiversa.wordpress.com/2013/01/28/cosificacion-sexual/> (Last access: 27th December 2014).

¹⁴ Some examples are available in the following links: Tom Ford, http://images.teamsugar.com/files/users/2/20652/34_2007/tomford2.jpg; Dolce & Gabbana, http://media.tumblr.com/dc08ccdf886c518edc28900141ad30cb/tumblr_inline_mtb3abNsO91rm7yyg.jpg; Sisley, <http://www.vivelapub.fr/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/sexytrash07.jpg> (Last access: 25th May 2015).

Compared with the most absolute explicitness which characterises these advertisements, there are others in which the narrative under study is constructed in a much more convoluted and subtle way so that they can avoid the rejection still felt by a considerable percentage of the population. In them the ideology and powers at stake are filtered surreptitiously, since the semiotic machinery employed by advertisers establishes a perfect interplay of light and shade between first and second order significations, according to Barthes (1972/1957), of each verbal and non verbal element which is part of it. Therefore these advertisements consist of various layers of meaning: the first and most superficial hides with a veil of innocence the second and deepest, which transmits the true message. In this way the advertiser succeeds in spreading the desired discourse with absolute impunity. He/she manages, in short, to construct a myth in Barthes's sense of the term.

From the perspective of advertising translation, we are particularly interested in knowing how these intersemiotic translations are constructed, to use Jakobson's term (1959), which powers interfere, which discourse is constructed, and how it is transmitted. Indeed, as we have mentioned, we consider that in order to translate ethically it is essential for the translator to be perfectly aware of everything at stake in a given transference. To do this, a semiotic disassembly — that is to say, the analysing of the intersemiotic translation which constitutes each advertisement — becomes imperative. This disassembly may turn out to be more or less complex, but it is essential for the translator to carry out his/her work successfully. In order to make this point, we have chosen an advertising campaign which constructs the narrative of women as sexual predators that is dealt with here in a particularly subtle way, by means of signs which are apparently innocent. Every element which is part of it conceals second order significations which the translator must perceive. Likewise, he/she must understand how this elements work to be able to re-construct them in the target culture. In fact, in advertising nothing is ever innocent: each advertisement constitutes a complex semiotic mechanism (Munday, 2004) where absolutely everything has a meaning (Vidal, 2012), from the atmosphere and colours — which are usually designed to evoke sensations (blue, cold; red, passion; green, nature) —, to the outfit and the woman's body itself, which becomes a rewriting space (Vidal, 2003) which therefore also transmits a certain ideology, etc.

Apart from the translator being able to do his/her job properly, the analysis of the intersemiotic translation which forms each advertisement becomes indispensable to raise awareness of the social consequences which may be derived from contributing to the spreading of certain discourses. In fact, we should not forget that language is performative and therefore it not only says, but above all does. In this sense, as Ricoeur (2006/2004) has already noted, translation not only represents an intellectual, theoretical or practical task, but an ethical problem. In the case of the campaign that concerns us which will be analysed below, we consider that contributing to its translation means taking part in the exercise of "symbolic violence", to quote Bourdieu (2001/1998), which is continuously exerted nowadays against women through most of the popular culture mechanisms which are all around us¹⁵. This violence is described by the French sociologist as "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition or even feeling" (*Ibid.*, p. 1-2). Indeed, in a disguised form this advertisement contributes to reconstructing and strengthening the concept of women invariably related to sex which inhabits our collective unconscious, in this case also mixed with extreme youth.

4. Corpus

Before analysing the campaign in depth, we must devote a few lines to describing it. *Oh Lola!* Was created in 2011 by the fashion company Marc Jacobs to publicise its new perfume "Oh, Lola!" at an international level. It was launched simultaneously in several western countries, including the USA, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain. The campaign was presented as the little sister of that conceived in 2009 to publicise a former perfume of the same company, "Lola"¹⁶, from which as we shall see it retrieves certain semiotic elements of major importance for constructing the desired discourse. According to Cronin (2000), this is a very common characteristic of different advertisements produced by the same company.

¹⁵ In this sense, we agree with Baker (2006) that every translator is responsible for the discourses he/she helps to re-produce and disseminate.

¹⁶ Advertisement of the *Lola* campaign by Marc Jacobs:

<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-iX1g2MwNkq0/TdpawDteqI/AAAAAAAAAz0/xosU2OCgMBA/s1600/Lola-Marc-Jacobs-Perfume-Review.jpg>. (Last access: 25th May 2015).

The *Oh, Lola!* Campaign consists of five printed advertisements in a minimalistic style in which we find very few elements which are common to all of them¹⁷. Firstly, we find the same girl, the actress Dakota Fanning, in the same scenery which is merely a simple pale pink background. The actress's outfit is also the same in all the versions: a short pale dress, almost the same tone as her skin, with white spots and flounces on the neck, sleeves and skirt, which emulates those worn by tiny girls and is also reminiscent of a doll's dress. The same thing happens with the last element, the bottle of perfume, which consists of a pink recipient crowned by a large flower, a rose to be precise, with red and fuchsia petals. Only the actress's posture and gaze vary from one version to another, as well as the size and the position of the bottle of perfume (see final annex).

As for verbal language, it only appears in two of the images analysed, which correspond to Advertisements 2 and 4 in the annex. In the former we can read the text written in capital letters ("The new fragrance for women") at the top, and at the bottom:

OH, LOLA!
MARC JACOBS
DAKOTA FANNING PHOTOGRAPHED BY JUERGEN TELLER
BLOOMINGDALE'S

As for Advertisement 4, the text is limited to the expression "Mode-obsession" in lowercase letters at the top of the advertisement next to the actress's face. Hereafter we will carry out a semiotic analysis which, as we have been insisting throughout this paper, the translator must take into account before making any decisions.

5. Analysis from a Translatology Perspective of the Oh, Lola! Advertising Campaign

Within the semiotic mechanism of each advertisement linguistic and non-linguistic signs can be distinguished. Although both work together to construct a single discourse and transmit an identical ideology, our analysis will deal with them separately in the interest of clarity. We will begin with verbal language, which as mentioned above is practically absent and is limited mainly to the expressions "Oh, Lola!" and "Mode-Obsession". In the first case, apart from being the name of the perfume being publicised (the first order signification) it also operates as a core element which gives the audience the key to the whole campaign: the word Lola, which together with the image analysed below redirects the reader to Lolita, the novel by Nabokov in which an adult becomes obsessed with a preadolescent; which was also adapted for the cinema by Kubrick with an actress whose similarity with Dakota Fanning is evident¹⁸. Here we have the real narrative which constructs the advertisement: that of Lolita (the second order signification), an extremely young sexual predator whose good-girl appearance creates the interplay of innocence and sexual provocation which constitutes a constant feature of the advertisement. This narrative is strengthened by the use of the "oh" particle common to a number of languages¹⁹, which not only denotes surprise but also pleasure based on the arsenal of non-linguistic signs analysed below. But let us first consider the meaning of the use of the other expression: "Mode-Obsession". As is the case with "oh", the close similarity between this English expression and its equivalents in the other languages of the countries where the campaign has been commercialised means that its first order signification can be understood in all of them. As for the second order signification transmitted by this formulation, it should be noted that the term "obsession" is a key one in the narrative of Lolita, a preadolescent who precisely causes this mental disorder in her stepfather. In relation to the term "mode" which accompanies it, we consider that it also consists of several layers of meaning: on one hand it refers to the world of fashion and thus to the whole universe of Marc Jacobs; but on the other hand it echoes the word "male", not only by the similarity between both terms but also by the font used to reproduce it, which makes us take a second look to check which term has been used. Like everything in advertising, this ambiguity is far from fortuitous; it can be interpreted as a surreptitious attempt to slip in new secondary meanings which contribute towards intensifying the narrative which concerns us. In fact, Barthes (1972/1957, p. 130) warns us by saying:

¹⁷ At the end of this paper a list containing all advertisements mentioned here and their corresponding on-line links is available in the form of an annex.

¹⁸ Images of the film *Lolita* are available in the following links:

<http://img.blogdecine.com/2010/06/lolita-f1.jpg>;

<http://www.160grams.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/kubrick-lolita.jpg> (Last access: 22nd May 2015).

¹⁹ It should be noted in this sense that the expression "Oh, Lola!" can be recognised in most western languages.

In the second (mythical) system, causality is artificial, false; but it creeps, so to speak, through the back door of Nature. This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden – if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious – but because they are naturalized.

In the same way as verbal language, non-linguistic signs which are part of the campaign help to construct the narrative of the woman as a sexual predator in that same ambiguous atmosphere, which oscillates between candour and innocence and the sexualisation of a minor. Firstly, we will analyse the image of the actress, Dakota Fanning, who was underage when the campaign was launched. It is precisely her youth which is relevant here, as well as the strong similarity between her and the actress of the movie version previously referred to. In all versions of the corpus advertisements she has loose blonde hair to her shoulders, parted in the middle, which reflects the simplicity of childhood together with her pale skin and light make-up. Her dress, already described in the corpus, is short and pastel-coloured to match the rest of the elements in the campaign. It is decorated with spots, which can also be associated with childhood, and the skirt has the shape of a flower when it is opened on the floor (see annex, Advertisement 2). In this sense it is particularly interesting to observe how a single semiotic element, the outfit in this case, reproduces in an extraordinary manner that desired effect of confusion which structures the whole campaign. Finally, it should be noted that in both Advertisements 1 and 3 the actress is barefoot, which also brings us back to childhood. Heidi, the cartoon character, used to run barefoot in the mountains.

Characterised in this way we find our Lolita in different attitudes, always with sexual innuendoes. In Advertisement 1 she kneels with her legs wide apart while holding a bottle of the perfume in each hand, and directs her gaze to her legs. In this case her attitude reveals complete submission. In Advertisements 2 and 3 she appears lying on the floor, staring at the viewer, which transmits provocative nuances typical of the narrative in question. In Advertisement 2, which is probably the most widely disseminated image of the campaign, she holds the bottle — which will be analysed later — between her legs, while in Advertisement 3 the bottle is placed on the floor opposite her sexual organs. In Advertisement 4 she is lying on an unidentified surface with slightly dishevelled hair, staring at the viewer while holding the bottle on a level with her face. We can see how her dress enhances the outlines of her breasts²⁰. Lastly Advertisement 5, which bears a strong resemblance to the previous one, shows a more innocent Dakota. She is no longer lying down but in a vertical position with not a hair out of place.

As for the scenery surrounding her, it only consists of a pale pink background, which constitutes an intersemiotic translation of the perfume and the “rose” sign, and evokes narratives of innocence, childhood and purity. These discourses are also suggested by the bottle of perfume, which as is mentioned in the corpus is crowned by a large rose which is one of the most interesting signs of the campaign, since its second order significations are very wide-ranging. On the one hand, the rose can mean nature, beauty, spring, but also virginity. The peculiarity of this sign lies in the changes of meaning depending on its location in the image and the way it is held by the actress. Thus the meanings and functions it has in Advertisement 2, in which Dakota holds it between her legs and where it clearly refers to sexual purity, have nothing to do with those of Advertisement 4, where it echoes beauty and purity in the aesthetic sense of the term. Regarding this sign, the translator must also bear in mind that the flower is a typical element in Marc Jacobs’s perfumes and has therefore appeared in former advertising campaigns²¹. In order to face the cultural transference of this campaign therefore, he/she will need to find out about the particular significance of the said sign for this company.

As we have seen, the ideology which informs this campaign and which is transmitted by it through each of its elements may be difficult to determine if the advertisements are not subjected to a denaturalisation process such as the one shown in these pages. Without it the translator will not be able to know what an advertisement does, which is precisely what should be translated into the new cultural context. Once these ideas are examined, he/she will have to assess two aspects.

²⁰ In this regard, it should be noted that some authors agree that in some contexts a lying position indicates vulnerability or sexual availability (Gallego, 2013; Goffman, 1979, p. 41, quoted in Martínez Reventós, 1998, p. 30).

²¹ Advertisements of “Lola” perfume are available at: http://nuochoahangxachtay.vn/Uploads/images/MarcJacobs_Lola3.jpg; and advertisements of “Daisy” at: <http://www.designscene.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Hannah-Holman-for-Marc-Jacobs-Daisy-Eau-So-Fresh-Fragrance1.jpg> (Last access: 22nd May 2015). It should be noted that both fragrances also present a floral decoration on the bottle top.

Firstly, he/she will have to consider whether the signs used in the source text are recognisable and if they transmit the same secondary meanings in the target culture. In this regard one could ask whether the Lolita narrative is known to the target audience, whether the rose evokes the same connotations in both contexts, or whether the colour range used²² makes the same noises, to cite Vidal (2013, 2012). Secondly, the translator should consider whether the dissemination of such a discourse would be acceptable in the target context. As we have previously indicated, this campaign was conceived to publicise the perfume “Oh, Lola!” at an international level in several western countries which apparently do not have great ideological differences. Its publication was accepted without qualms in every national context where it was commercialised, except for one, the United Kingdom, where it caused a social scandal of such proportions that it had to be regulated by the authorities, which obliged the company to eliminate the images of the campaign in that country²³. Indeed, the viewer’s sensitiveness is one of the key elements that interferes with advertising translation and is therefore something that every translator specialising in this field should know perfectly well, because a misunderstanding or an offence could lead to the most abject failure of a campaign.

6. Conclusions

During these pages we have tried to show that a good advertising translator must be above all a semiotic expert able to denaturalise all signs, both linguistic and non-linguistic, which constitute a given campaign. By means of the campaign chosen here we have attempted to prove that what an advertisement does, the ideology which it transmits, is not always a straightforward process, since very frequently its true message is transmitted by second order significations protected by a thick layer of first order ones which make them appear innocent and natural, to use Barthes’s terms (1972/1957). The semiotic disassembly carried out here of the *Oh, Lola!* Campaign faithfully portrays this and also invites us to reflect on the importance of knowing the behaviour of different signs in different cultures, but also about the acceptability threshold of each one regarding certain issues. In this sense, Marc Jacobs’s advertisements have shown us that although the hypersexualisation of culture appears to be common to all western countries, we cannot affirm that its sensitiveness and acceptance are uniform. They therefore reveal an essential aspect which the translator will have to bear in mind when carrying out his/her job within these parameters.

Finally, we wish to insist that as in advertising where nothing is ever innocent or neutral, the campaign which exemplifies our previous statements has been chosen because of the narrative which we have intended to construct here. In fact, as Mona Baker claims (2006, p. 129), “all research is a narrative”. The ultimate goal we have pursued in these pages therefore consists of analysing one of the most widespread and naturalised current media stereotypes and therefore, one of the most dangerous ones about women; a stereotype of which sexuality is its main (and virtually its only) characteristic. In this way we intend to draw attention to the fact that translation participates directly in the creation of the concept of women in the various cultures at stake in this exercise, because as Beauvoir pointed out (1989/1949), what we understand by a woman is a socially constructed cultural product. Thus we advocate proactive research since we consider that the fight against stereotypes linked to gender is not only a problem concerning (a small group of) women, it rather is the key to achieving democracy (Hermes, 2011, p.7).

Annex

The *Oh, Lola!* Advertising Campaign

Advertisement 1 Dakota Fanning kneeling with her legs wide apart while holding a bottle of perfume in each hand. Available at: <http://www.fiorani.com.ar/images/productos/producto-6967-0.jpg>

Advertisement 2 Dakota Fanning sitting on the floor holding a bottle of perfume between her legs. Available at: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-XzACQN2Mdf0/UW88691PidI/AAAAAAAAApE/sktMPgpDTvE/s1600/teller6.jpg>

²² For further information about cultural differences in colour interpretation, see the following article about these connotations in Arab culture: Bilal A. Al-Adaileh (2012) “The Connotations of Arabic Colour Terms”, in *Linguistica Online*, May 2012, available at: <http://www.phil.muni.cz/linguistica/art/al-adaileh/ada-001.pdf> (Last access: 22nd May 2015).

²³ “Marc Jacobs’ Dakota Fanning ad banned for being ‘sexually provocative’”, in *The Guardian*, 9th November 2011, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/nov/09/marc-jacobs-dakota-fanning-ad-banned> (Last access: 25th May 2015).

- Advertisement 3 Dakota Fanning lying on the floor with a bottle of perfume placed on the floor opposite her sexual organs. Available at:
http://wallpapersinhq.com/images/medium/a-dakota_fanning-1392855.jpg
- Advertisement 4 Dakota Fanning lying on the floor with a bottle of perfume close to her face. Available at:
http://auto.img.v4.skyrock.net/7718/52317718/pics/3009913823_1_7_Tx1HKHhi.png
- Advertisement 5 Dakota Fanning's face with a bottle of perfume on her right. Available at:
<http://images.chickadvisor.com/item/26948/original/44a386130977cb2675d8e491e3baacc8.jpg>

Acknowledgement

This research was financed by a national grant awarded to Alba Páez Rodríguez by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of the Spanish Government and is part of the research project "Traducción, medios de comunicación y opinión pública" (FFI2012-35000) financed by the aforementioned institution.

References

- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global culture economy. *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 7, 295-310.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Baker, M. (2006). *Translation and Conflict. A Narrative Account*. New York: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1972/1957). *Mythologies* (Annett Lavers, Trans.). New York: The Noonday Press.
- Bassat, L. (1999). *El libro rojo de las marcas (Cómo construir marcas de éxito)*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe.
- Baudrillard, J. (2012/1991). *The Wolf War Did Not Take Place* (P. Patton, Trans.). Washington: University of Washington Press.
- Beauvoir, S. (1989/1949). *The Second Sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1995/1982). *Language and Symbolic Power* (G. Raymond and M. Adamson, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001/1998). *Masculine Domination* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Castells, M. (2005). The message is the medium. An Interview with Manuel Castells. Interviewer Terhi Rantanen. *Global Media and Communication*, 1(2), 135-147.
- Castells, M. (2010/1996). *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Volume I*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Corbacho Valencia, J. M. (2010). La publicidad a nivel internacional: estrategias, condicionantes y límites. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 2nd AE-IC International Congress, Málaga, Spain, 3-5 February.
- Cronin, A. M. (2000). *Advertising and Consumer Citizenship. Gender, Images and Rights*. London & Nueva York: Routledge.
- De Andrés del Campo, S. (2007). Monstruos sobre Eva. In Álvarez Pousa, L, Puñal Rama, A. B & Evans Pim, J. (Eds.). *Comunicación e xénero. Proceedings of the International Forum on Communication and Gender, Liña and Pontevedra, Spain, 9th of October-25th of November, 2006*.
- Del Moral Pérez, E. (2000). Los nuevos modelos de mujer y hombre a través de la publicidad. *Comunicar*, 14, 208-217.
- Diaz Fouces, O., & Monzó, E, (Eds.). (2010). *Applied Sociology in Translation Studies/ Sociología Aplicada a la Traducción*. Monographic issue of *MonTI*, 2.
- Díaz Soloaga, P. & Pimentel, A. (2002). "Porno-chic", aspectos estéticos y éticos de una tendencia en auge. Retrieved from: <http://www.adlatina.com/publicidad/%E2%80%9Cporno-chic%E2%80%9D-aspectos-est%C3%A9ticos-y-%C3%A9ticos-de-una-tendencia-en-auge>.
- Duro Moreno, M. (2001). *Traducir publicidad o el arte de pasar hambre*. Granada: Editorial Comares.
- Eckert, P. & McConnel-Ginet, S. (2013/2003). *Language and Gender*. (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eco, U. (1994/1964). *Apocalypse Postponed* (partial trans. with other texts). Bloomington: Indiana U.P.
- Eco, U. (1986/1973). *Travels in Hyperreality* (partial trans. with other texts). New York: Harcourt.
- Elliott, A. & Lemert, C. (2014). *Introduction to Contemporary Social Theory*. New York: Routledge.

- Feliu Albaladejo, Á. (2009). Publicidad y cambio social: nuevas realidades, ¿nuevos discursos? In Feliu, E. (Coord.). *Comunicación: memoria, historia y modelos*, 396-406.
- Feliu Albaladejo, Á. & Fernández Poyatos, D. (2009). La mujer en la publicidad: hacia nuevos discursos. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the conference Actes de Congènere: la representació de gènere a la publicitat del segle XXI, Girona, Spain, 25-26 May.
- Fernández Martín, C. (2012). Porno-Chic and Advertising in Women's Magazines. In Women's History Network Blog. Retrieved from: <http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/?p=1506>.
- Foucault, M. (1971/1970). *The Discourse on Language* (R. Swyer, Trans.). *Social Science Information*, April 1971, 7-30.
- Foucault, M. (1978). Dialogue sur le pouvoir. Entretien avec les étudiants de Los Angeles. In Wade, S. (Ed.). *Chez Foucault* (pp. 4-22). Los Angeles: Circabook.
- Gallego, J. (2013). De reinas a ciudadanas. Medios de comunicación, ¿motor o rémora para la igualdad? Barcelona: Aresta.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press.
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender Advertisements*. London: MacMillan.
- Grijelmo, A. (2009/2000). *La seducción de las palabras*. Madrid: Santillana Ediciones Generales.
- Grünig, B. (1990). *Les mots de la publicité: l'architecture du slogan*. Paris: Presses du CNRS.
- Harvey, D. (1992/1990). *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Hermes, J. (2011). Mujeres y periodistas primero. Proyecto de manual sobre los estereotipos de género en los medios de comunicación. Retrieved from: http://www.celem.org/pdfs/programas/Manual_Estereotipos.pdf.
- Inghilleri, M. (Ed.) (2005). Bourdieu and the Sociology of Translation and Interpreting. Special issue of *The Translator*, 11(2).
- Jakobson, R. (1959). On Linguistic Aspects of Translation. In Brower, R.A. (Ed.). *On Translation* (pp. 232-239). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kuppens, A. H. (2010). English in Advertising: Generic Intertextuality in a Globalizing Media Environment. *Applied Linguistics*, 31(1), 115-135.
- Lash, S. & Urry, J. (1994). *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage.
- Levy, A. (2006). *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York: Free Press.
- Martínez Reventós, M. D. (1998). Decoding Cosmetics and Fashion Advertisements in Contemporary Women's Magazines. *Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa* 7(1), 27-39.
- McLuhan, M. & Powers, B. R. (1989). *The Global Village. Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meschonnic, H. (2011/2009). *Ethics and Politics of Translating* (P. Boulanger, Trans.). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Montes Fernández, A. (2006) Globalización y publicidad: el lenguaje universal de los perfumes. *Hispanogalia*, 2, 217-226.
- Munday, J. (2004). Advertising: Some Challenges to Translation Theory. *The Translator*, 10(2), 199-219.
- Páez Rodríguez, A. (2013). La (no) traducción como estrategia publicitaria: ¿qué se cuele entre las grietas de la lengua con el (ab) uso de la lingua franca? *Estudios de Traducción*, 3, 57-50.
- Papadopoulos, L. (2010). Sexualisation of Young People Review. Retrieved from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10738/1/sexualisation-young-people.pdf>.
- Pawelczyk, J. (2008). Symbolic Annihilation or Alternative Femininity? The (Linguistic) Portrayal of Women in Selected Polish Advertisements. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 4(2), 311-332.
- Piller, I. (2001). Identity constructions in multilingual advertising. *Language in Society*, 30, 153-186.
- Ricoeur, P. (2006/2004). *On Translation* (E. Brennan, Trans.). New York: Routledge.
- Sarikakis, K. (2013). Media and the Image of Women. Report of the 1st Conference of the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality. Council of Europe. Retrieved from: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women_media/Media%20and%20the%20Image%20of%20Women,%20Amsterdam%202013%20-%20Abridged%20Report.pdf
- Urry, J. (1998). Contemporary transformations of time and space. In Scott, P. (Ed). *Globalization of Higher Education*. London: SRHE/ Open University Press.

- Valdés Rodríguez, C. (2004). La traducción publicitaria: comunicación y cultura. Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Servei de Publicacions.
- Vellón, J. (2009). El uso del inglés como estrategia discursiva en el texto publicitario. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, 7, 157-182.
- Vidal Claramonte, M. C. A (2003). La magia de lo efímero: representaciones de la mujer en el arte y literatura actuales. Castellón de la Plana: Universidad Jaume I, Servicio de comunicación y publicaciones.
- Vidal Claramonte, M. C. A (2007). Traducir entre culturas. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Vidal Claramonte, M. C. A (2010). Traducción y asimetría. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Vidal Claramonte, M. C. A (2012). El lenguaje de las revistas femeninas españolas: la (no) traducción como ideología. *Meta*, 57(4), 1029-1045.
- Vidal Claramonte, M. C. A (2013). Estereofonías de la traducción. In Alonso, I., Baigorri, J. & Campbell, H. (Eds.). *Traducir el Derecho. Cuestiones teóricas y metodológicas* (pp.15-22). Granada, Comares.
- Walter, N. (2010). *Living Dolls. The Return of Sexism*. London: Hachette.
- Wolf, M. & Fukari, A. (Eds.). (2007). *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. New York & Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Wolf, N. (2002/1991). *The Beauty Myth*. New York: Perennial.
- Yuste Frías, J. (2006). La pareja texto/imagen en la traducción de libros infantiles. In Luna Alonso, A. & Montero Küpper, S. (Eds.). *Traducción e política editorial de literatura infantil e xuvenil* (pp.267-276). Vigo: Servizo de Publicacións da Universidade de Vigo.