

**Translation of the Automobiles Brand Names from the Culture Perspective****Guangqi Zhang<sup>1</sup>, Juan Geng<sup>2</sup>**

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**Abstract :** *With the rapid development of global automobile industry, there is an increasing trend of business communication and trade cooperation, which makes it a necessity to translate automobile brand names, and brand name translation has become an important part and a research hot spot in the field of applied translation. Based on the theory of principle of equivalence, this paper makes a brief analysis on the Chinese translation of foreign automobiles and summarizes several translation methods of automobile brand names. It is important for us not only to know the sources and features of automobile brand names, but also to master various translation principles and different translation methods such as literal translation, transliteration, free translation, free translation and transliteration and transferred translation, etc. + to achieve the desired effect.*

**Key words:** *automobile brand names, principle of equivalence, translation*

**1 Introduction**

Nowadays, what the global economy brings is the international trend of well-known trademarks. Auto industry, as a complex of myriad industries, must realize the localization of its product from the cross-culture perspectives under the influence of economic and cultural globalization. With the rapid development of global auto industry, automobile trademark, as a business concept, is not only a kind of commercial concept with the referring meaning, but one winning tremendous business opportunity and generous profit for automakers. A successful trademark is a crystallization of collective wisdom as a symbol of corporate image and product quality. However, the translation quality of automobile brand names will affect the success or failure of international marketing activities and market development directly.

An automobile trademark represents a car brand, shows off its personality and plays a role of advertising for the marketing of the products. Automobile trademark is not only a mark, but also a kind of culture. The rich cultural aesthetics and idea value that it contains stand for a special treasure and an intangible asset. It is also a common goal of domestic, as well as international automakers that people can enjoy the cultural aesthetics of automobile trademark when they own a high-quality automobile. Consequently, the translation of automobile trademark is not a mere process of language transformation, but that of cross-cultural communication. It's a kind of complicated code-switching. The translator should both take into full account the social and cultural characteristics and aesthetic consciousness of target readers and express the idea and

artistic conception of source language, only in this way can businessmen realize the goal to promote sales.

## 2 Principle of Equivalent Translation

The feature of modern brand name is to deliver information of the product, make consumers understand and implement purchasing behavior. The naming process of trademark is based on cultural background, way of thinking and standard of value and so on. Different consumers have different comprehensions about the same trademark, so it is not an easy job to translate a short trademark from one language into another, and automobile trademark is no exception.

From a linguistic perspective, the naming process of trademark is not subject to the influence of sentence, paragraph and chapter and so on. Nevertheless, because of the special need, that is to say, to reflect the information and category and stimulate consumption desire through the trademark, the translation of trademark shows a complex phenomenon to a certain degree, and it needs the guidance of accurate theory and principles of translation.

### 2.1 Content of Equivalent Translation

Nida, Father of the modern western translation theory, is an American translation critic. In his opinion, people can hardly reach an absolute consensus in translation. He advocates dynamic equivalent translation and emphasizes the closest natural equivalence in the target language. In his book *Language and Culture—Contents in Translating*, he indicated that the reader of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it (the translation) in essentially the same manner as the original readers did (Nida, 1993, p. 39). Specifically, the translation does not rigidly adhere to the form of original text, but gain equivalence with its original content. It is necessary that the translator should try his best to well and truly express the ideological content, style and romantic charm of source language with the target language, which can be seen that principle of equivalence of Nida is the most suitable theory for trademark translation.

Translating automobile trademark is an important link in auto marketing. It helps gain cultural resonance of target consumers, pass on the romantic charm of the product. The translation of trademark should achieve the effect, easy to remember, easy to read and easy to say and perfect combination of pronunciation, structure and meaning. So it is necessary to shake off the shackles of rigid ideas, innovate boldly, and act consummately the connotation of the product.

### 2.2 Requirements of Principle of Equivalence

#### ▪ 2.2.1 Information Equivalence

The brand name of car should reflect the car information. Brand name is the concentration of the quality of the products, materials, uses, and other aspects of enrichment. A product name

should provide enough information, whenever consumers see the brand name, they would have certain understanding. As American scholar Lawrence has mentioned that translation is not to eliminate the difference of language and culture, but to express the differences. Many foreign car brand names are named according to the names and places, they will be less functional. In translation, translators should make full use of the Chinese characteristics, and be careful of choices of words. For example, Jaguar in English means “the tiger of United States”, but its Chinese translation is “捷豹”. This translation is not only easy to read and write, but also reflects the speed and agility degrees. It can provide consumers with the same information. This is the information equivalence.

### ▪ 2.2.2 Function Equivalence

Automobile brand names should be vivid and interesting; they can lead people to imagine. Brand names of car, named after plants, animals, mythical images or other vivid things, will usually remind people of good things and stimulate the consumers. In associations, Chinese language has unique advantages. For example, Crown can be translated into Chinese as “皇冠”, no matter in English or Chinese, “Crown” can give a person a kind of noble and comfortable feeling and reflect a high status in society. Chinese version can convey the original meaning of the trademarks well, and can be easily accepted by Chinese consumers as the native expression.

### ▪ 2.2.3 Words Equivalence

Automobile trademark names should be short, be easy to speak, write and remember. Looking at the market of car brand names, foreign names are usually two-syllable or three-syllable words, which are easy to remember. For example, Hummer (悍马), both Chinese version and the original name are two-syllable word, is short enough, which just reflects the words equivalence. In addition, most of the trademark translations are composed of one to four words.

### ▪ 2.2.4 Culture Equivalence

Translators should pay attention to the difference between cultures. In recent years, the cultural differences are becoming much larger; people pay more attention to the exchange between people. In the process of sale, the sales' personal negligence of cultural differences can cause catastrophic loss. For example, Chinese translation of “dragon” is “龙” which means power, myth, and justice. But in many western countries, it is the symbol of evil. For example, “金龙” is a brand name of China automobile, but in the international market its English translation is not “Golden Dragon” but “King Loong”, because its translation must coincide with the culture of the goal language. Translators should pay special attention to those sensitive words to achieve cultural equivalence.

### 3 Translation of Automobile Brand Names

The trademark translation is a cross-cultural communicative activity; it is named after another language. But due to the great differences between Chinese and western culture, there exists great cultural barriers in the trademark translation. Trademark translation is a cross-cultural communication activity concerned with language, business, and culture and background knowledge. Therefore, translators must consider the differences between different cultures and study how to translate flexibly to express the correct information and achieve the equivalent pragmatic translation. For a foreign enterprise, trademark translation is not only the translation problem, but also relates to the image of the export commodities and business opportunities. A trademark translation may influence the fate of international commodity, which is also intangible asset. The trademark translation is so important that translators should pay attention to the trademark translation and study it from all aspects.

The trademark translation belongs to business translation, but also has its own characteristics. The trademark translation is not like the literary translation and professional translation, and it boasts of image and professional items. With the development of reform and opening policy, foreign business activity is increasingly expanding, and trademark translation is also more and more attentive.

#### 3.1 Influential Factors of Translating Automobile Brand Names

A brand name is an important constituent part of the brand. It represents not only enterprise culture but also social status of consumer group. Therefore, which kind of brand naming strategy should we use? We must balance the question from the total height of branding strategy, that is to say, the brand name must match other elements and interrelated marketing activities of the brand name. Besides, it must accord with specific product orientation, consumers' psychology, corporate objective and trend of competition of the product. From the branding strategy, we can find that there are at least the following three factors which can influence the translation of automobile brand names.

##### ▪ 3.1.1 Cultural Factor

Culture can affect and decide people's consumption motivation, psychology, concept and behavior. People of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds have their own special cultural tradition, living habits, national sentiments, religious taboos even language system. Therefore, if translating brand names, we must consider corresponding cultural factors. For example, Prado of Toyota, its old name is “霸道”. It would expect to express the meaning that this SUV has no fear of hardships and dangers. However, when it was linked with advertising picture, it made consumers associate “Prado (arbitrariness)” with the meaning of unjustifiable behaviors, bullying behavior and arrogance and reminded Chinese people of Japanese aggression, which hurt Chinese national pride. Its advertising picture was that Prado ran on the

road powerfully, and two stone lions squatted by the wayside, one reaching out right paw to salute the SUV and the other one bowing its head. Its advertising message was “Prado, you have to respect”. The mistake of the advertising lay in misunderstanding of Chinese culture. They can not understand the position of lion in China. It symbolizes dignity, and it is the king of the animals. Toyota put his product in front of stone lions and let the lions salute Prado, which made Chinese feel humiliated. As a result, the SUV sales proved disappointing. Therefore, the company has to change its name into “普拉多” to dilute delicate cultural differences between China and Japan.

### ▪ 3.1.2 English Level of Consumers

Before the 20th century, most Chinese consumers hardly knew English except for several words. If only there are English brand names, Chinese consumers barely understand and identify the product, let alone arouse association and purchasing desire. Even if there is a Chinese name, no matter transliteration or literal translation, if it does not accord with cultural psychology of Chinese consumers, they would think it is just a foreign brand, and its sales would be disappointing. For example, in 1992, when BMW entered Chinese market, it was named after “巴依尔” by transliteration. The Chinese name hardly aroused consumers’ a positive, meaningful and related association, so it was difficult to sell well. However, when changing its name into “宝马”, the name not only emphasizes the nobility and luxury of BMW, but also is coherent with Chinese traditional appellation. Adding to effective marketing means, it is no less surprising that BMW is so popular. There are many other examples, such as Benz (奔驰), Lexus (凌志), Camry (佳美), etc. These Chinese names are in keeping with target market positioning and the taste of Chinese consumers, but they have different meanings with their English names in home market. Therefore, it is an important communication way to match culture psychology of target consumers, and translation methods lay stress on free translation or transliteration.

### ▪ 3.1.3 Globalization of Enterprises

With the development of high technology and communication network, the consumers receive a better education and get an impact of global culture, which make them have the similar consuming desires. Both opportunities and challenges for the enterprises have been brought into many areas and countries. Some enterprises pay attention to the local market and localization of marketing strategies, and also attach importance to globalization of markets. For example, top leadership of Toyota shows, all the pronunciations of Toyota car brand names should be similar so that it is convenient to unify their names. Therefore, the company of Toyota make the rule that all names of the products can be used by transliteration, and some products have abandoned their old famous names, such as, Camry, Corolla, Lexus have changed their Chinese name from “佳美, 花冠, 凌志” into “凯美瑞, 卡罗拉, 雷克萨斯” respectively. New translations make

people recall their English names, which is conducive to get a coincident and positive cognition in all consumers.

### **3.2 Translation Principles of Automobile Brand Names**

The ultimate goal of car brand is to maximize the economic benefits of automotive products, namely to convey the excellent information exactly, attract the target consumers, trigger a better association, stimulate the desire to shop and trigger purchasing behavior. The following principles can be used in the translation of automobile brand names.

#### **▪ 3.2.1 Reflection**

The brand name is the enrichment of all aspects of the quality, materials and use of goods. The product name should provide a certain amount of information to enable consumers to have a general understanding of the goods. Foreign car brands are largely named after names, places, but they are lack of function in this regard, that is why we should take advantage of Chinese characteristics during the translation process and devote to the selecting of words. Such as “Mercedes Benz”, “Mazda”, these names can make people relate with good performance of automobile traffic machines.

#### **▪ 3.2.2 Imagination**

Brand names named after such mythical figures can make people associate with good things and stimulate consumer possessive and desire to purchase. In the respect of triggering association, Chinese names have some natural advantages. Many car names have no deep meaning in the original language, but their Chinese names are endowed with good sense. Sweden’s SAAB, Chinese translation is “绅宝”, in fact, it was originally just the abbreviation of the company’s first letters, but the Chinese translation gives people a noble and elegant feeling. The Chinese name of a Japanese car Lexus is “凌志” which gives rise to an association of cherishing high aspirations. BMW will make the consumer remember the glorious poem of Huang Jun “将军雄武气纵横, 宝马雕弓出锦城”.

#### **▪ 3.2.3 Memorization**

Brand name should be short, easy to read and remember. Looking at the car names, their foreign names give priority to double or three syllables, and such pronunciations of names are easy and brief; Most of the translations include two characters and no more than four words at most. According to Chinese naming habits, two and three words names are easy to be accepted, and four words names are more rhythmic and easy to remember. However, if the brand name contains more than four words, for most people, it is difficult to grasp. For example, Rolls-Royce

was translated “罗尔斯·罗伊斯” which was not in line with Chinese naming conventions, so it is gradually replaced by “劳斯莱斯”.

#### ▪ 3.2.4 Cultural Differences

With the improvement of all cultural exchanges, people also pay more and more attention to the influence of cultural differences. The American General Motors Corporation once put a kind of cars Nova export to Mexico, but it did not provoke great repercussion in the country. The survey found that nova in Latin meant a new start, but its root “va” in Spanish meant “go”. In this way, “Nova” at the local culture had the meaning of “not go”. Ask, who will buy the car which can not move? Later, the company changed its name into Caribe (卡利比), then its sale was to be better. Besides, Chinese Dongfeng automobile pays attention to cultural differences. because of geographical differences, in China it means the east wind, but in other countries it may not be, so its translation is “Aeolus” (风神).

Of course, there is a wide gap between Chinese and western language cultural differences, so it is hard to abide by the four translation principles in the process of naming car products, but holding these principles well will undoubtedly help to narrow and even completely dissolve the differences.

### 3.3 Translation Methods of Automobile Brand Names

Only if they grasp the characteristics of the automobile brand names and the principle of equivalence and abide by a suitable translation strategy should the translators be qualified to take part in the practical translation. They should make use of their imagination and creativity and dig out the target language as much as possible. They should also get close to the culture of target language and build the equivalent translation of brand names between Chinese and English trademark. To achieve this goal, the translator can use these five translation methods: literal translation, transliteration, free translation, transliteration combining with free translation and transferred translation. These methods are important for translators to get a perfect translation, and it is useful to give full play to advertising capability and promotion function of the automobile brand name and make the product talk with consumers directly. Accordingly, it will help consumers accept the product with pleasure and achieve the aim of stimulating purchases.

#### ▪ 3.3.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to the translation that follows closely the form of the source language so as to preserve the semantic and grammatical features of the second language as much as possible, and also to preserve the style of the original language. Literal translation of the brand name is based on the non-violation of the rules and the meaning of the original language, which helps to preserve the meaning, the style and the grammatical features of the original

language. For instance, if the original meaning of the goods contains some implications, literal translation would convey its implications directly, and also it may contribute to its marketing. Therefore, the advantages of literal translation are to preserve the original name of the brand and to convey its message and its emotion.

For example, Chinese translation of “Mustang” is “野马”. The two names give the readers a feeling of indulgence. Obviously, it reaches the equivalence of their semantic meaning, so it is a successful translation. Other examples as following, “Blue Bird” is translated into “蓝鸟”, symbolizing the happiness of the future, which is quoted from the fairy tale *Bluebird* of the Belgian writer Maurice Maeterlinck. The poem of Tang Dynasty Li Shangyin said, “蓬山此去无多路, 青鸟殷勤为探看”. “青鸟” is the ambassador of the Peng Mountain fairyland, and “青” and “蓝” refer to the same color – “blue”. Therefore, its translation is “蓝鸟” which reads fluently and has nearly the same cultural background. For another example, Beetle of Volkswagen of German Company, as its appearance looks like a beetle, it is translated directly as “甲壳虫”. And the translation sounds vivid and is well-known to all Chinese people. For the same purpose, the literal translations of “Lotus, Horizon, Phantom, Corolla, Fiesta, Land Wind, Gazelle and Firebird are “莲花, 地平线, 幽灵, 花冠, 嘉年华, 陆风, 羚羊, 火鸟” respectively which have deep emotions and elegant implications and convey the original meanings of the goods well.

### ▪ 3.3.2 Transliteration

Transliteration based on the non-violation of the target language conventions and non-misunderstanding, is a kind of translation method which translates the brand name into the words which have almost the same pronunciation with the original brand. Because of the existence of cultural generality, there may be some similarities on pronunciation and form between English and Chinese vocabularies. As a result, the translations and the original brand names will nearly have the same cultural and rhetorical meanings and bring us vivid imagination. For this sake, transliteration would help to preserve the calling function and the phonological beauty of the original brand name.

Because so many automobile brand names are named after their inventors, a great many of internationally well-known automobile brand names are translated by means of transliteration. For instance, “Rolls-Royce”, the English royal car brand, is named after Frederick Henry Royce, an English engineer, and Charles Stewart Rolls, an English noble, and it is translated into “劳斯莱斯”. As the symbol of social status, it is the mount of the Queen of English, because the car is elegant and highlights the style of the Queen. There was such a rule that only the noble had the rights to own such a car. Another American car “Cadillac” (凯迪拉克), one of the five car series of GM, it is well-known for its elegance and is the pronoun of luxury cars. It is named



after Le Sieur Antoine de la Nothe Cadillac who made great contribution to the Detroit development to show respect to the great explorer for that in 1701 he built the Detroit Motor City. By focusing on the conventional way from the original language to the target language, transliteration is much more faithful to the original name of the brand and it will help the internationalization of the brand. Toyota changing its two series of cars has explained this point exactly. In 2004, Toyota announced to change the name of SUV “霸道” (Prodo) into “普拉多” and also the name of Lexus from “凌志” into “雷克萨斯”. The main purpose of doing this is to unify the names of all its products. Not only the translation of the imported cars adopts the transliteration but also the translation of the China-made cars. For example, the name “赛弗” of Great Wall and the name “优利欧” of Geely, their translated names are “Safe” and “Uliou” respectively. What is more, one kind of light vehicle of Chery adopts English letters “QQ” which combines its name, fashion and cuteness together.

Transliteration would also help to preserve the phonologic beauty of the original brand name, reflect its exoticism and cater to some Chinese consumers’ value orientation. Especially for auto products, as China’s automobile industry starts a little later and the quality level is lower than that of other countries, the majority of Chinese consumers take it for granted that the imported cars are much better than the China-made cars. As a result, the adoption of transliteration would draw the attention of consumers. In the process of translating automobile brand names, it will be much easier for those brand names which can pronounce easily, sound well, and have strong impact but have no specific meaning in all languages to use transliteration. For example, the French Citroen series —Pegaso, Xsara and Elysee are translated after the name of French celebrity, famous scenery and well-known building, giving the consumers the French feeling and implicating the noble heredity of the auto. The brand names adopting transliteration include Audi (奥迪), Buick (别克), Santana (桑塔纳) and so on.

The trend of transliteration in brand translation has been becoming more and more popular and drawn an increasing number of people’s attention especially the traders because it conveys the meaning vividly and emotionally. At the same time, transliteration would lead to fewer obstacles on understanding caused by the difference of language, culture and society than free translation. Moreover, the transliteration would help the brand names spread all over the target countries.

### ▪ 3.3.3 Free Translation

Free translation starts with the pronunciation of the original brand names or the nature of the products, gets rid of the bounds of the literal meaning of the original brands and creates a translated name which has a favorable association by selecting the words carefully. This translation method aims to create new names for the products to achieve the equality of its functions and the easiness of remembering and broaden their market shares. The best example to

explain the means of free translation is the Germanic limousine BMW. BMW is short for Bavarian Motor Works but has no cultural meanings. If using literal translation, it is too long and can not arouse good imagination. If using transliteration and keeping BMW, it can not conform to Chinese language habits and reflect the property of the car. From English letter “B”, the translator thinks initial consonant [b], so he creates “宝” which means rarity and embodies expensive value of the car. From the second letter “M”, he thinks “马” which starts with initial consonant [m]. Before inventing cars, horse was one of vehicles. In Chinese traditional culture, it was ancient people’s dream to have a fine horse who was good at running, and it is modern people’s pursuit to own a famous car with high performance. Therefore, the translation “宝马” is a unity of form and spirit and rich in Chinese cultural deposits.

Nanjing Fiat Company’s car “Weekend”, its Chinese meaning is “周末”, but its Chinese name is “周末风” which not only embodies the excellent performance of the car—its speed is so quick but also describes a fashionable picture of the lives that driving a car to have an outing on weekend. How can people not be imaginative and arouse strong urge to buy? Excellence of American Buick has the same effect. The Chinese meaning of excellence is “超越”, but its Chinese name uses “凯” which means victory, so the translation is “凯越”. The name not only expresses the meaning of the primitive name, but also enriches its connotation.

Free translation does not rigidly adhere to primitive name, but creates another Chinese name in order to blend in Chinese culture and open Chinese market. Therefore, when translators use free translation, they should choose auspicious words which play up to aesthetic taste of Chinese consumers and attach these cars wonderful dreams, such as “美, 瑞, 顺, 雅, 乐”, etc. For example, Epica (景程), NF (御翔), Accent (千里马), Accord (雅阁). For some common nouns, if its Chinese meaning can reflect the quality and purpose of the car and accord with Chinese habits, translators can use free translation.

Free translation is also a kind of creative translation. It is an effective supplement for conventional translation methods, and it aims to find a different and special way to solve the difficult question in translating automobile brand names. There are commonness and individualities between Chinese and English culture. Because of different cultural background, traditional customs and consumption psychology, the translation of automobile brand names must realize cross-cultural communication with the goal of target readers. When the automobile brand names are translated into another language, the translator should keep gaining insight into their cultural habits, likes and dislikes, in order to make the business activities achieve expected goal.

### ▪ 3.3.4 Free Translation and Transliteration

With the method, translators can choose some close Chinese words according to the pronunciation. Besides, the translation should reflect qualities of the product and meet consumers' psychology. It balances the pronunciation of original brand name with Chinese cultural customs.

For example, a German famous car "Mercedes Benz" was translated into "梅塞得斯本茨" in mainland, "宾士" in Taiwan and "平治" in Hong Kong. Comparing the three translations, the first translation was loyal to source language, but there was no connotation; the second one was noble and elegant, but it did not embody functions and features of the car; the third one can make people imagine ruling the world, but it also can not embody character of the product. Now, its translation is "奔驰" which not only follows its English production, but also reflects superior performance of the product from its Chinese words. Another famous car "Bora" is named after the sea wind of Adriatic Sea. And Volks Wagens translates it into "宝来" which has cultural deposits and means a treasure in automobile is coming. How can consumer resist the temptation?

The translation of Porsche is "保时捷" which has a meaning of being speedy and punctual and makes people have a good impression on the brand. There are many other similar translations, such as Reiz (锐志), Tucson (途胜), Vios (威驰), Fit (飞度), Livina (骊威), Charade (夏利), Chery (奇瑞), Citroen (雪铁龙), Family (福美来) and so on.

### ▪ 3.3.5 Transferred Translation

This method is most used for translating Japanese automobile brands. Usually, translators translate English into Japanese, and then into Chinese, such as Honda (本田), Yamaha (雅马哈), Mazda (马自达), Toyota (丰田), Nissan (尼桑) and so on.

Automobile brand names can help consumers identify products and convey the faith and purpose of manufacturers. They can be regarded as an epitome of the company culture. Therefore, it is not an easy thing to translate automobile brand names. Translators should have a rigorous attitude, master features of automobile brand names, observe principle of equivalence and use different translation methods in the entire process of translating. Only in this way can the brand name enjoy a better reputation, widen the sales market, even sweep through global markets.

## 4 Conclusions

An automobile brand name is a comprehensive language art with great aesthetic value and a rich conception. It is the icing on the cake if a good product adds a fair-sounding and attractive

brand name. Therefore, for translating automobile brand names, it is necessary translators give full play to their imagination and use different translation methods such as literal translation, transliteration, free translation, transliteration and free translation and transferred translation to make the culture and spirit that the automobile brand name represents get continuous transmission and further promotion. In addition, under the guidance of principle of equivalence, the choice of translation method and principle must be subject to the expected goal of maximizing economic benefits of automotive products, attracting target consumers, arousing lots of imaginations and triggering consuming desires and purchasing behaviors. In a word, brand consciousness wins support among the people, great efforts should be made on the translation of automobile brand names.

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