

Translation of Brand and Food Label Products into Arabic: a Preliminary Linguistically Analysis

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Abstract

Brand is among element that needs to be given a special attention for any product. A good brand name enjoys a high level of consumer brand awareness and errands strong consumer priority. The importance of branding in marketing management has been well addressed in previous studies. Translation of food label in the product for marketing purpose should not be taken for granted, since it may affect the product presentation and it is the major source of information for consumers. This article is written to observe food product brand with Arabic translation which has spread in Malaysia market. To achieve this objective, food label products were selected randomly and analyzed with contrastive linguistics on lexical meaning. The analysis focuses on the semantic interpretation and lexical equivalence from source language (SL) and target language (TL). The findings of the study are expected to provide infant insights for marketers of both Malaysian local products and foreign products and propose more accurate and friendly translation for the target market. Moreover, this study will further gain more understanding of domestic culture and international connection especially with Middle East tourists to Malaysia.

Keywords: brand, translation, linguistic, lexical, Middle East

Introduction

To date most translation studies from English or Malay into Arabic were related to religious texts, general books, articles and literatures.

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Arabic translation of tourist brochure, advertisement and personal documents has increased in Malaysia context, especially when the Middle East tourists aim their destination to Malaysia. In addition, some Malaysians who received an offer to serve in the Middle East countries need to translate their personal documents into Arabic prior their arrival and visa application.

The goal of Arabic translation for brands and food label is to promote products and their contents, so that potential consumers will have their interests and needs aroused, and ultimately their purchase decision will be taken. Therefore, a good and accurate translation is vital. It is recognized that reading and obtaining information in mother tongue is far more close to individual. A careful translation exercise is truly perusal, as meanings vary greatly across norms, attitudes, beliefs and cultures.

Azman *et al.* (2009) has mentioned the increasing number of Middle East tourist arrival to Malaysia was leading to awareness of the importance of Arabic language. This is very significant to mention that the tourism industry plays a major contribution for Malaysia economic growth. It was an open secret that almost all tourists from that region adore to spend during their trip to another country. Usually, each Arab tourist has spent about RM5,000.00 per trip. Meanwhile Zalikha (2009) proposed the importance of Arabic language among future tourist guides to compete themselves in tourism sectors. They were considered as an agent or as a small ambassador in promoting Malaysia in the eyes of the world.

Even Arabic language is not alien to the majority of Malaysians, the use of the language conventionally restricted in religious schools and courses that taught Arabic for Islamic education. Therefore the Arabic use within community for commercial and economical purposes was not given priority. But when the trend of Middle East tourist was noticed for having a positive growth, some parties have taken proactive action to grab opportunities in economic activities that have direct connection with Arab tourists. Among other things that draw attention for study is the use of Arabic language for tourism purposes.

As mentioned by Mohamed Zain (2009), many Arab tourists are not conversant in English. Thus the use of Arabic language is undeniably an important reason in boosting the Malaysian tourism industry.

Due to the limited source to determine specific products that employ Arabic translation, this study will only consider brand and food label for scrutiny. This initial step is hoped to some extent; open a new horizon in considering Arabic use within economic activities in Malaysia. As reported by Hashim *et al.* (2013) Arabic language proved to possess a very high potential in tourism industry in order to increase job opportunities, economic growth as well as promoting Malaysia in the international level.

Therefore this article has two objectives to achieve:

1. To identify Arabic translation of brand and food label in Malaysia market,
2. To analysis the translation linguistically.

Based on the objectives, this article doubtlessly is limited within linguistic discussion and analysis. In addition, linguistic approach is a practical method to disclose linguistic issue that may, in researcher's consideration will enhance brand and product packaging presentation. Finally, such assumption could not be drawn from this study to provide or to generate brand study or product from other perspectives such as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty rather than was said.

Literature Review

Brand and Food Label

Appropriate brand names make a significant difference in the successful introduction of brands into new market. When concentrating on brand and food label, two major things were taken into account; cultural and language differences. Needless to mention, this difference caused the problems in international markets have already come to the attention of some researchers. Simon and Palder (1987); Cravens *et al.* (1987) for example, found that consumer's behaviour and language were among the major barriers to international market entry to Japan. Cravens *et al.* (1987) also pointed out that language difference was critically important in the international environment (*cf.* Chang & Huang 1997).

In addition, the consumer behavior literature documents the importance of branding in consumer decisions (Mudambi 2002). This is true that the power of branding is truly accepted in consumer markets. Generally, brand name is undergone special attention among researchers. Functional benefits of brand may be most relevant, yet emotional and self-expressive benefits can also matter. Mudambe (2002) mentioned that buyers are willing to seek out a brand for an expected functional benefit, such as a higher quality physical product or associated services. Aaker (1991) noted that the value of a brand name is associated closely with its awareness, quality perception, and the customer satisfaction engendered by related products and offerings, among others while Erdem (1993) asserted that brands are symbols that consumers have learned to trust over time, and they often signal intangible product qualities (*cf.* Shocker, A. *et al.* 1994).

Study conducted by Borra (2006) reported that consumers have mixed views on food labeling. Some find it useful for making better food choices, whereas others believe it is too complicated and should be easier to use. Study carried out by Janet & Malvin (2012) found that different race of consumer have different awareness to read food label for their diet. Non-Hispanic whites had higher and African-American adolescents had lower frequencies of reading fat information on the nutrition label in comparison to Mexican-American and other Hispanics.

Tymms (2011) mentioned in the absence of proper scientific study, it could be argued that since it is known that consumers have differing motivations, abilities, goals and aspirations, a selection of nutrition labelling schemes may serve those diverse needs quite well.

Moreover provided information of the products is highly expected by the consumers. Thus food product that Muslim consumers are expecting must be '*halal*' and '*tayyibah*.' *Halal* means the content and the process of preparation must comply with Islamic *Syaria*. While *tayyibah* may refer to the good quality and healthy.

Therefore targeting market of Muslim consumers in food industry must take into consideration the *halal* and *tayyibah* concept. To achieve this objective, clear and convincing brand and information provided must meet the consumer expectation. Food products presentation basically would communicate to the consumer through packaging, brand name and useful information (in Malaysia halal certificate is essential for confirmation of halal food).

Arabic Translation in Malaysia Tourism Industry

No major study has investigated translation of brand and food label into Arabic in the context of Malaysia, which is probably intended for consumer market in international business. Previous studies that seem to be similar to the current study are conducted by Naimah and Hayuza (2005) and Mohamed Zain (2009). Both studies focused on the important of Arabic translation for tourism industry development in Malaysia.

As mentioned by Naimah and Norhayuza (2005) there are significant indicators that the use of signboard for place and direction information in Arabic language in strategic location for Arab tourists. However, the quality of translation was yet far than satisfaction. For instance, the name of place has been translated with weird pronunciation. Hence, even Malays who know Arabic might be confused with the name, needless to say what will happen to the tourist with no information of the place. Besides that, Arabic system of writing also was ignored by most of signboard provider and their customers.

Mohamed Zain (2009) specifically shed a light on tourism promotional texts (TPTs). He discussed the important of genre convention of the Arabic. With referring to Hatim's example while demonstrating the English view of the genre is different from that of its Arabic counterpart, he clearly suggested that patterns which are unique to the genre of Arabic TPTs must be adhered. Finally, he recommended that translators must be having the ability to recognize the different function of text.

Hashimet *al.* (2013) reported that 80% of their respondents were indeed having communication problems while shopping in Malaysia. Beside of having low proficiency of Arabic command among shoppers, it was also predicted most of the goods have not provided information in Arabic language. Therefore, this study at least might be able to highlight linguistic issues in Arabic use of product targeted to Arabs tourists.

Linguistic Translation

This article as reflected by the title will mainly focus on linguistic perspective. Linguists have divided their research into two major domains, namely pure linguistic and applied linguistic. Apart of this category, single or multi disciplines approach was carried out in linguistic research. Along with the technology development, linguistic study is frequently associated with different technological instrument such as computer, internet and smart phone. Linguistic features are not differently investigated as in conventional way. There is still spoken language, stressing on phonetic and written language including writing system, syntax, semantic and pragmatic.

Obviously, study on brand and food label will come along with the verbal text. Verbal texts display the possible communicative functions, informative, expressive and operative (Reiss 1977/1989). Previous studies on brand name, Chan & Huang (1997) have classified the semantic requirements for brand name such as 1. Positive, not offensive, obscene, or negative; 2. Modern or contemporary, always timely; and 3. Understandable and memorable. Since linguistic features in brand and food label are strictly brief, contrastive linguistic on lexical meanings considered for application.

Contrastive linguistic is a branch of linguistics concerned with showing the differences and similarities in the structure of at least two languages or dialects (Merriam Webster 2014). Matthews (2007: 79) concluded any investigation in which structures of two languages are compared is contrastive linguistic. The structure of language consisted of lexical, phrase and stylistic. Through contrastive linguistic approach, information of two languages can be considered as equivalent or otherwise.

Lexical meaning refers to any aspect of meaning that is explained as part of a lexical entry for individual unit (Matthews 2007: 224). Normally to learn a various meaning of lexical (word) dictionary was used to reach selected words in study. Lexical meaning in discourse for certain degree may vary depends on the register. Therefore context meaning will be found different to lexical meaning in certain cases. However it is worthwhile to examine lexical meaning because it bears an original meaning and commonly understood by the native speaker.

The term linguistic translation was introduced by Catford (1991) has highly focused on lexical, sentence and semantic equivalent.

He mentioned the linguistic features that may help and become constrains for translating process. Thus, Catford's frame work of grammar translation was adopted for this study. As mentioned by Leornadi (2000), Catford had a preference for a more linguistic-based approach to translation and this approach is based on the linguistic work of Firth and Halliday.

Methodology

Data

Since this study is relatively new, the data was determined in two stages, at the first stage researcher needed to identify the brand and food label that carrying Arabic translation. After visiting several hypermarkets around Dungun district, not many products were found as carrying Arabic translation. To be justified in data selection, 24 hours hypermarket with spread branches was determined for data collection. It was assumed that this hypermarket shares the same standard for their goods. Moreover, it was believed that Arab tourist as a target costumer has visited these places for their needs. Certain product with popular brand was identified for having Arabic translation.

At the second stage, the products were collected randomly with general characteristics. They are translation of brand, motto, ingredients, date and place. After frequently survey on several product, only two categories of food label were selected (cracker and chocolate) because they are identified as the most product using Arabic translation and fulfill the criteria. For this study five food labels were used asa data they are Roller Coaster, Double Decker, Mister Potato, Vochele and nips.

Analysis

The focus of analysis on the graphology features, morphological structures and semantic interpretations which are the linguistic foundation guiding brand and food label translation in Malaysia. For graphology features, clear and correct use of Arabic scripts will be examined. Morphological structures mean any of lexical (single word) used in Arabic translation needs to be classified as Arabic or transliteration. Semantic interpretations rely on equivalence of SL to TL in parallel comparison.

To achieve this, contrastive analysis is opted to deal with issues such as graphology of Arabic text in the data, the syntactic structure of the translation, and some semantic and informative aspects.

Findings

In this section, the first objective of the study will be answered. The selected data generally categorized into five parts; brand name, motto, ingredients, manufacture and information of weight and recommended date of use. The table 1 below demonstrates the categories:

Table 1: Translated and Untranslated

Product Category	Roller coaster	Double Decker	Mister Potato	Vochelle	Nips
Brand name	Not translated	Not translated	Not translated	Not translated	Not translated
Motto	Not translated	translated	translated	translated	Not translated
Ingredients	translated	translated	Not translated	translated	translated
Manufacture	translated	translated	translated	translated	Not translated
Information of weight and date	translated	translated	translated	translated	translated

From the table above, the brand names were not translated which mean the producers keep the original name either with English and Malay version or English version alone. Both were presented with a big font and bold. It might be assumed that consumers will no need to translate the brand because Double Decker and Mister Potato were among popular brand in the international market. While less popular brand like Roller Coaster, Vochelle and Nips were not translated as well. The untranslated brand name of these products for some extent lead to less attraction of the Arabic consumer and did not help those with limited ability to read and pronounce English words. But if the producers have intended to global market (or in this case, Arab tourists) they must consider linguistic universals that regulate what is possible and what is impossible in the structure of a language and make statements to the effect that some characteristics are found in all the world's languages while others are not found in any (Allan & Yue 1997).

Three motto of the products were translated into Arabic (Double Decker, Mister Potato and Vochelle) while two were remained in English only (Nips) and English and Malay versions (Roller Coaster). Four of the product ingredients were translated (Roller Coaster, Double Decker, Vochelle and Nips) and only one is not translated (Mister Potato), four manufactures were translated (Roller Coaster, Double Decker, Mister Potato and Vochelle) and only one is not (Nips). However all information of weight and date in the products were translated. Here, clearly that no standard translation of given information is applied to the food product even commonly the brand name and the information of weight and date are seem to be a similar practice.

Table 2 below shows the Arabic translation and linguistically analysis as mentioned in the methodology section. Each translation is accompanied with the original text in English and Malay versions for motto translation.

For the second objective, an analysis of Arabic translation was carried out as figured in table 2, 3 and 4. For further discussion, the following paragraph will demonstrate:

Table 2: Motto Translation

Double Decker		Mister Potato		Vochelle	
Translation	Original	Translation	Original	Translation	Original
مقبلات بنكهة دجاج دبل ديكر	1.Chicken cracker 2.Snek perisaayam	نكهة حارة و مبتلة التطابق الطبيعي	1. Hot & spicy flavor 2. Perisarem pahpedas	منتجات الحليب [شوكولاتة الحليب]	1. Dairy milk 2. Coklatsusu

The first translation of Double Decker seems is not literally translated into Arabic. In English version ‘Chicken Cracker’ literally means مكسرات الدجاج. But, in Malay version ‘SnekperisaAyam’ is equally to Arabic translation. The translation of Mister Potato is quite different as it can be read in the table. The word مبتلة and التطابق الطبيعي are used to mention attribute of the product as ‘wet’ and ‘original’. Both English and Malay versions do not bear this information. The third translation (Vochelle) is fully equivalence in term of word selection but in Malay version the information is different. When literally ‘منتجات الحليب’ is translated, it means ‘Dairy product’ and in Malays version ‘Coklatsusu’ it means ‘chocolate’.

Therefore the half information of the product is not exposed in this translation. Ironically, translation of 'chocolate' into Arabic is located in back-side of the label with "شوكولاتة الحليب".

Therefore both products, Double Decker and Mister Potato have used communicative translation for their motto presentation. In Arabic مقبلات means appetizer (Baalabaki 1995: 1086) which is not appear in English. It's is assumed that translator has bear in mind that the word (مقبلات) will have more impact on the target. Likewise the word مبتلة means wet, moist (Baalabaki 1995: 947) and التطابق الطبيعي that refer to truly original. By using these words, Arab reader will imagine the attribute that exist in this product. Thus it is a good sign that Arabic translation was done with regard to target consumers expectation and cultural background.

For ingredient translation, similarity and different term will be compared among four food labels by using the table 3 below. Overall of these examples, it is obvious that terms used in Arabic were literally translated from English. Two techniques were identified; they are parallel translation (word to word) and transliteration (Arabicization of English). To look at these techniques closely, it is worth using a table as follows:

Table 3: Translation of Ingredient

Parallel translation (word to word)	
English	Arabic
Dehydrated potato	بطاطس مجففة
Potato starch	نشأ البطاطس
Vegetable oil	زيوت نباتية
salt	ملح
Contains permitted flavouring substances	يحتوي على نكهات مسحوحة
Permitted flavor enhancer	والذي يعمل كمعزز للنكهات المضافة المسموحة بها
English	Arabic
Wheat flour	دقيق القمح
Starch	نشأ
vegetable oil (palm olien)	زيوت نباتية (زيت النخيل)
Contains permitted flavouring substances (containing)	يحتوي على مكسبات طعم و رائحة مصرح بها (يحتوي
Salt, sugar	سكر ملح
Contains stabilizers (E500-E503) as permitted for use	يحتوي على مثبتات (E500- E503) كمكيفات للأغذية
Contains	يحتوي على
As permitted flavor enhancer	كمحسنات نكهة مصرح بها

Baking powder	خميرة خبز
Spices	توابل
Contains permitted food additives of plants and	يحتوى على إضافات غذائية مصرح بها من أصل نباتي
May contain traces: Crustaceans, fish, celery, mustard	قد يحتوى على آثار: القشرات الأسماك الكرفس الخردل
English	Arabic
Sugar	سكر
Milk solids	جوامد الحليب
Cocoa butter	زبدة الكاكاو
Cocoa mass	كتلة الكاكاو
Vegetable fat	دهن نباتي
palm	نخيل
Soya (E322)	الصويا (E322)
English	Arabic
Raisins	زبيب
Sugar	سكر
Vegetable fat	دهن نباتي
Hydrogenated palm oil	(زيت النخيل المهدرج)
Milk powder	مسحوق الحليب
Cocoa powder	مسحوق الكاكاو
Wax	شمع
Contains permitted colouring substances and fo	يحتوي على مادة تلوين و مكيف للأغذية مصرح بهما
soya	الصويا
Gum Arabic	وصمغ عربي
Transliteration (Arabicization of English)	
English	Arabic
Glutamate	غلوتامين
Monosodium	احادي الصوديوم
English	Arabic
Dextrose	دسكتروز
Glutamate	جلوتامات
Monosodium	احادية الصوديوم (E621)
English	Arabic
Illipeshea	إلب شيا
Lecithin	لستين
Vanillin	فانيلين
English	Arabic
Carnauba	كارنوبا
Vanillin	ونيلين
Lecithin	ليسيتين

The first thing needs to mention in this section is different lexical used for Arabic translation from English such as: 'permitted' is translated with *المسموحة* and *مصرح*. In Arabic *مسموح* refers to 'be given permission, authorized and empowered (Baklabaki 1995: 644). While *مصرح* refers to 'be permitted, allowed, licensed and authorized (Baklabaki 1995: 693). From this account, it can be suggested that translator has used an accurate lexical to translate the lexical 'permitted.' Since Arabic language is known for having many synonyms in its vocabulary.

In term of Arabicization, graphology of Arabic is not standardized. Therefore it's crucial to determine the most accurate with referring to English-Arabic Dictionary. The lexical are *غلوتامين* - *جلوتامات* - *لستين*; *جليشيين* - *لستين*; *فانيلين* - *فانيلين*; *فانيلين* - *فانيلين*. The lexical *غلوتامين* is found in English-Arabic Dictionary (346) while lexical *جلوتامات* does not exist. The lexical *لستين* is appear in google translate with an extra information 'مادة دهنية' (fat substance) and *جليشيين* are not found in the dictionary or google translate. As to lexical *فانيلين* is appear in google translate with an extra information 'مركب كيميائي' (chemical composition) but not lexical *فانيلين*. The lexical *دسكتروز* is found in google translate but not lexical *إيب*. Thus, it is certainly confusing for the reader because no standard Arabicization was practiced in the translation.

The translation of manufacturer of the product with other related information into Arabic is demonstrated in table 4 below:

Table 4: Translation of Another Information

Roller coaster	Double Decker	Mister Potato	Vochelle	Nips
صنع في ماليزيا الوزن الصافي غرام يفضل الاستخدام قبل	صنع في ماليزيا الوزن الصافي غرام يفضل الاستخدام قبل * nutrition informat ح ل ا appears الحجم And others	التصنيع بواسطة التوزيع بواسطة التوزيع بواسطة صنع في ماليزيا الوزن الصافي غرام يفضل الاستخدام قبل	مكان نظيف وبارد و جاف معلومات غذائية حجم الوجبة عند الوجبات في كل باكيت متوسطة القيمة في كل وجبة في كل غرام الطاقة البروتين الكربوهيدرت الدهون الوزن الصافي صالح قبل	الوزن الصافي غرام يفضل الاستخدام قبل

As demonstrated above, similar translation of ‘made in Malaysia’, ‘net weight’, ‘best before’ and ‘gram’ with *صنع في ماليزيا*, *الوزن الصافي*, *يفضل الاستخدام قبل* and *غرام*. Commonly, this information was found translated into Arabic but not all nutrition information of the brands were translated. Only Double Decker and Vochelle provided it with Arabic translation. Unluckily, Double Decker’s translation did mistake graphology arrangement such as: *الحجم* appears *م ج ح ل ا* and others. While Vochelle has a detail translation for it and different translation for ‘best before.’ It seems that translation of ‘best before’ with *صالح قبل* is more accurate and natural in Arabic expression. Because the phrase *يفضل الاستخدام قبل* if literally means ‘preferably use before’ bears an extra meaning. The difference of ‘best before’ and ‘preferably use before’ is the first means the product is only good to consume before the stated date, otherwise it may affect consumer negatively. While the second means the product is suggested for consumer in certain date but with no limitation when it will expire. Thus, it yet can be consumed after the date without any affection.

Discussion

In sum, there are some commons in the distribution of the different types of brand and food labels which correspond to Arabic translation. The result shows that brandnames are not translated into Arabic. These tend to reflect that manufactures were not aware or totally rely on English as an original brand name and it needs not to be translated. Whatever is the reason; this study cannot justify the real excuse for that neglect. However the motto line translations for two products (Double Decker and Mister Potato) were identified for having communicative translation. This is due to the fact that by applying communicative approach, the target reader (in this case, Arab consumer) will be closely able to reach and to absorb the information of the product.

Based on linguistic analysis, it can be learnt that graphology mistake in the food label happens and it needs for correction. Technical aspect of Arabic graphology in printing sometimes should not be taken for granted for it may end up with unwanted result. Manufacturers or related departments for product packaging have to invest to ensure the quality of the used language.

Another intriguing finding of this study is how translator has practiced Arabicization of English term, especially for ingredient text. However, this translation strategy has resulted varieties in a new word. As mentioned by Ghanami (2007) this is among translation problems encountered by translator. Therefore translator has to follow a principles provided in Arabic's new term construction. To be more appropriate, using specific dictionary for specific term will help. However it is certainly challenging to find this kind of dictionary in Malaysia context.

Conclusion

The study reported a preliminary result of brand and food labels investigation on translation into Arabic in Malaysia context. Translating brand and food labels is a complicated task and this study shows that the linguistic aspect of a brand is not of particular concern of a product. The contextualization of brand naming into Arabic in the Malaysian consumer market is yet not be practiced in terms of syllabic, tonic, semantic, and compounding structure. Obviously, food label information was translated into Arabic for limited product. It was understood that there could be a belief among producer and market player in food industries, that only certain product may penetrate Arabs or Arabic native speaker by considering culture values and so on. This may help marketers in reaching Arab consumers for their products.

The study has shown language contact phenomena in brand and food label have not anymore been neglected. It is true that English has largely become a non-national language and has been appropriated by manufacturers in non-English-speaking countries like Malaysia. English has become the language of modernity, progress, and globalization (Chang & Huang 1997). Based on this study, Arabic language was taken into consideration to play a rule in engaging with Arabs consumers. Future research should be carried out to determined more comprehensive result and gain more data in various brands. Survey on the effectiveness of the translation of the Arab consumers can be evaluated to obtain better understanding and positive feedback.

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