Conflicts Related to Sexist US Advertisements and to Their Translation

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Abstract

This study discusses multiple conflicts within the context of advertising in relation to gender and translation, focusing on advertising in the US. To begin with, it explores gender in advertising addressing the conflict between advertising (of the past and present)—a rather sexist industry—and subvertising, which includes the reconstruction of advertisements in order to criticize the original advertising messages. The next conflict arises between sexist representations of women in contemporary advertising and its audience’s increasing urge to break these rigid gender stereotypes, as critical comments on social media show. Furthermore, this paper focuses on the translation of advertising in relation to gender. More specifically, it analyzes the conflict between sexism in advertising language and the objectives of a translation process aimed at gender equality. Finally, it considers the feminist translator’s inner conflict, as they face the dilemma of creating either a profit-oriented translation or an equality-oriented translation, or even a possible combination of both.

Keywords: gender equality, advertising, subvertising, translation, conflict(s).
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Introduction

Within the frameworks of advertising, gender, and translation, this interdisciplinary study aims to explore various conflicts related to gender in advertising and in the translation of advertisements. To begin, I will discuss gender in US advertising, addressing the conflict between the undeniably sexist industry of advertising (both of the past and the present), and subvertising, which includes the reconstruction of advertisements in order to criticize the original advertising messages. Several examples demonstrate the potential for subvertising as a means of promoting equality, including the 2018 photography project In a Parallel Universe by visual artist Eli Rezkallah, based on US magazine advertisements of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Other interesting examples include online parodies of current US advertisements, such as those created in response to a 2011 “Got Milk?” advertising campaign, which appeared on the Los Angeles-based comedy website Funny or Die. A similar conflict arises between sexist representations of women in contemporary US advertising.

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2 The terms “gender equality” and “equality” are used interchangeably in this paper; the same applies to the terms “equality-oriented” and “feminist.”

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and its audience’s increasing urge to break these rigid gender stereotypes, as critical comments on social media show. The examples include Twitter users’ responses to a 2014 milk advertising campaign launched by Coca Cola’s Fairlife brand.

Moving on to the second conflict type, I will then discuss translation in advertising and how gender is handled in this context. Specifically, I will explore the conflict between sexism in advertising language and the objectives of a translation process aimed at gender equality. Here, the advertiser’s aim of financial gain, which can promote the use of sexist elements in advertising, comes into conflict with the feminist translator’s interest in language use that fosters gender equality. An intriguing case of 2016-2018 commercials in German, English, and Greek which promote the over-the-counter medicine Nasivin/Ronal, controlled by US-based Procter & Gamble, shows how this conflict affects the translation process. Finally, the discussion will turn to the feminist translator’s inner conflict: Should the translator create a profit-oriented translation or an equality-oriented translation focusing on feminist translation strategies? Is it possible to combine both, or are these goals incompatible? If the translation of sexist advertisements is inevitably a negotiation process, and negotiation necessitates compromise, then who needs to compromise: the advertiser, the consumer, and/or the translator?

Although it may be challenging to find a definite answer to these complex questions, I argue that in this particular context the conflicts in themselves are equally if not more important than a possible compromise. The more active and visible the conflicts related to gender, advertising, and translation are, the more they shed light on issues of gender inequality in language and society. Gender equality can then be fostered effectively in different ways: through the technique of subvertising, through everyday critical reactions on social media, and through the recognition of linguistic sexism in advertising, which can promote a feminist translation of advertisements. I will examine these approaches in more detail in the following sections.

Conflicts Related to Gender in Advertising

The power of the media in general and of advertising in particular raises the question of how an individual can filter all the information transmitted by these sources. According to the UNESCO “Grunwald Declaration on Media Education” of 1982, “[r]ather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, we need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today’s world” (emphasis added). Although it is important to recognize the indispensable cultural importance of the media and advertising, as they are definitely socio-culturally related to the time in which they are produced, this does not automatically mean that the messages they send should be accepted as well. Therefore, what citizens of the twenty-first century need to develop is the general skill of media literacy and especially the sub-skills of advertising literacy.

The question that may arise here is what exactly is meant by the term “media literacy.” In their article “Media Literacy, Media Education, and the Academy,” William G. Christ and W. James Potter define media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts” (7; emphasis added). There are many definitions of media literacy available,
but this one has been widely accepted and used repeatedly over the years. Interestingly, this definition includes the aspect of creation. This implies that media consumers can assume a more active role (if they so choose), moving from the mere reception of media messages to their actual production, as I will explain further below.

As regards “advertising literacy” in particular, this type of media literacy refers to “an individual’s knowledge of and abilities to cope with different types of advertising techniques,” as Liselot Hudders at al. note in their article “How Advertising Literacy Training Affects Children’s Responses to Television Commercials versus Advergames” (911). To be more specific, advertising literacy in relation to gender can be defined as the awareness of gender stereotypes in advertising—an awareness that can lead to resistance to these stereotypes. One efficient technique to foster media literacy, and mainly advertising literacy, is subvertising. Subverting is the re-creation of an advertisement in the form of a new, fictional advertisement which parodies and subverts the original. Another efficient technique is the use of posts or comments on social media to analyze and criticize an advertisement. These two techniques—subvertising and social media criticism—are analyzed further in the following two sub-sections respectively.

Conflict between Advertising and Subvertising

Through the use of technology, media consumers are simultaneously able to be media producers (in the broadest sense of the term, without the need for a commercial background) with the ability to subvert advertising messages. Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart R. Poyntz confirm that the active participation of media consumers in media production is vital, noting in their 2012 book Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction that “participation in media consumption and production has increasingly become the norm rather than the exception” (5). This inevitably raises the following question: How is it possible for the public to become active media influencers and/or producers, as opposed to a mass of passive media consumers who simply receive ready-made messages?

Admittedly, advertising literacy is typically linked to the reception rather than the production of messages; nevertheless, contributing to the production of media is a way to participate in the (re-)formation of media. Media power is indisputable, but human power, or citizen power, enhanced by the increasing availability and accessibility of technological tools, should not be underestimated. In his 2006 book entitled Convergence Culture, Henry Jenkins discusses the term “participatory culture,” which “contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other” (3). Within the context of a contemporary participatory culture, one useful technique for responding to advertising is subverting.

“Subverting” is a portmanteau blending the words “subvert” and “advertising.” As its etymology implies, subvertising is a successful way to subvert the stereotypical patriarchal values dominating mass media. In their book Cyberculture: The Key Concepts (2004), David Bell et al. describe subvertising as “the Art of Cultural Resistance” (31). In the context of gender in advertising specifically, subverting is used to resist the imposition of a fixed sexist culture
transmitted through stereotypical linguistic and visual representations of women and men in advertising. Kristine Somerville explains the fundamental driving force behind this kind of (re)action in her article “Subvertising: The Art of Altering the Message,” pointing out that “[s]ubvertisers see advertising as . . . a form of visual pollution, white noise, background clutter. They seek to take the space back from brands by ‘hacking’ the images that proliferate on the streets of our major metropolises” (110). However, in the cases examined in this article, subvertisers are not interested in reclaiming advertising space for aesthetic reasons. Rather, they are more focused on making a public statement about popular perceptions or misconceptions of gender. As the graffiti artist and subvertiser Hogre stated in an interview in 2017, subvertising is used in general as a “psychic defense against the virus of consumerism.” As the examples will demonstrate, subvertising serves as a form of resistance not only “against the virus of consumerism” but also against the virus of sexism in language and society. Additionally, the space that is reclaimed in these examples of subvertising is mainly a digital space, not a physical space. In fact, subvertising can take multiple forms, enabled by the dexterous use of new technologies. The subvertisements examined here are digital parodies that play with sexist advertisements in order to criticize them. Thus, subvertising inevitably involves the reconstruction of meaning in advertising—in these cases, this meaning relates to gender. Of course, effective subvertising shows that the subverter is already media literate to some extent, aiming to make others media literate as well. Hence, an engaged artist is well suited to assume such a role.

A rather intriguing example of subvertising is the 2018 photography project “In a Parallel Universe” by visual artist Eli Rezkallah, based on US magazine advertisements of the 1940s, 50s and 60s. The project can be viewed on the artist’s official website entitled Eli Rezkallah, where prints of his artwork are also available for purchase. As Rezkallah describes his project on his website, “‘In a parallel universe’ is a series of fictional images, recreated from real ads in the mad man³ era, that question modern day sexism: showing it through a humorous light to spark a conversation through role play.” Rezkallah has switched both image and text, substituting women with men and vice versa. The result is a successful illustration of the absurdity of sexism in advertising. Below are a few examples of the old corporate advertisements along with Rezkallah’s photographic works from his website (fig. 1-5):

³ In the New York Times article “‘Mad Men’ and the Era that Changed Advertising,” published on 3 Apr. 2015, Emily Steel describes [the television series] “Mad Men,” which chronicles the New York advertising world in the 1960s. The program . . . captures the . . . industry during a pivotal period of transformation. It was an era marked by the dominance of the creative executive . . . ; the formation of advertising conglomerates; the rise of television; the slow beginnings of increased opportunities for women and minorities; and the advent of innovative technologies, like the copy machine and the computer.
Fig. 1. Original Advertisement (Brand: Alcoa Aluminium, Decade: 1950s) (Left) and Eli Rezkallah’s Subvertisement (Right); “In a Parallel Universe”; Eli Rezkallah; elirezkallah.com, 2018, elirezkallah.com/inaparalleluniverse

Fig. 2. Original Advertisement (Brand: Chase & Sanborn, Decade: 1950s) (Left) and Eli Rezkallah’s Subvertisement (Right); “In a Parallel Universe”; Eli Rezkallah; elirezkallah.com, 2018, elirezkallah.com/inaparalleluniverse
Conflicts Related to Sexist US Advertisements and to Their Translation

Fig. 3. Original Advertisement (Brand: Hardee’s, Decade: 1940s) (Left) and Eli Rezkallah’s Subvertisement (Right); “In a Parallel Universe”; Eli Rezkallah; elirezkallah.com, 2018, elirezkallah.com/inaparalleluniverse

Fig. 4. Original Advertisement (Brand: Hoover, Decade: 1950s) (Left) and Eli Rezkallah’s Subvertisement (Right); “In a Parallel Universe”; Eli Rezkallah; elirezkallah.com, 2018, elirezkallah.com/inaparalleluniverse
One major aspect of Rezkallah’s subvertisements is the mimicry of the original body language. All original advertisements presented here (fig. 1-5; left) clearly show that “[t]he body language of women and girls [in advertising] remains passive, vulnerable, submissive and very different from the body language of men and boys,” as the pioneering media educator Jean Killbourne stated in her 2014 TEDx Talk “The Dangerous Ways Ads See Women” (00:09:20-00:09:28), discussing the stereotypical image of women in advertising. Interestingly, Rezkallah’s subvertisements not only switch the sexes of the figures depicted, but also play with stereotypically masculine and feminine body language. He has done what the famous sociologist Erving Goffman describes in his seminal work *Gender Advertisements* (1976), analyzing specific body language features of women and men in advertising: “by imagining the sexes switched and imagining the appearance of what results, one can jar oneself into awareness of stereotypes” (25). Some of the specific body language traits which typify the stereotypical representation of women in advertising and are—not coincidentally—also observable in the advertisements targeted in Rezkallah’s photography project are as follows:

1. “The [f]eminine [t]ouch”4 (Goffman 29): Women are typically depicted “using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface.” As Goffman further describes, “[t]his ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds” (29).

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4 See fig. 1-2.
2. “The [r]itualization of [s]ubordination”\(^5\) (40): Women are more frequently pictured in physically lower positions—for instance, lying down (41)—or in various “canting postures” (46), including but not limited to a “knee bend” (46), a “body cant” (46) or a “head cant” (47). These postures indicate vulnerability and submission.

3. “Licensed [w]ithdrawal”\(^6\) (57): Women are often pictured “engaged in involvements which remove them psychologically from the social situation at large, leaving them unoriented . . . and . . . dependent on the protectiveness and goodwill of others who are (or might come to be) present” (57).

In Rezkallah’s photographs, the effect of these gendered body language associations is clear: Although men have replaced women, one could say that the men still look like women, since their body language is stereotypically—even exaggeratedly—feminine.

This shows that merely switching the sexes is not enough to expose sexism; the submissive gender (in Rezkallah’s art: men) has to comply with the fixed codes of representation for the submissive gender (in reality: women). These—socio-culturally constructed—fixed codes constitute the “codes of gender,” as termed and analyzed by communication scholar Sut Jhally in his 2010 documentary film *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Popular Culture*. As he explains further in a 2014 lecture at the University of Massachusetts entitled “COMM 288: Lecture 03—The Codes of Gender 1,” “the breaking of the code is the confirmation of the code” (00:20:46-00:20:50). Thus, when a man is depicted in a way in which a woman is typically depicted, this may result in an uneasiness—a strange or even humorous effect that ultimately confirms the power of the stereotypical body language linked to women and men. Subvertisers can therefore use this uneasiness caused by the “breaking of the code” to draw attention to the problematic portrayal of gender in advertising, inspiring their audience to reject its messages.

Nevertheless, some would argue that the advertisements used by Rezkallah as raw material are too old, and advertising today is no longer sexist (or at least not as sexist as it used to be). However, the advertisements that bombard us daily hardly confirm this assumption. Sexism in advertising may not be so blatant or so frequently as blatant today, but it has certainly not been eliminated. Moving from the distant past to the recent past to explore contemporary American advertising can help illustrate this.

A US “Got Milk?” advertising campaign, released by the California Milk Processor Board and advertising agency Goodby, Silverstein & Partners on July 11, 2011, was the subject of the *New York Times* article “Campaign Says: ‘Got PMS? Get Milk.’” In the article, written on the same day the campaign was released, author Stuart Elliott quotes the following headlines from some of the advertisements:

- “I’m sorry I listened to what you said and not what you meant.”
- “We can both blame myself.”

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\(^5\) See fig. 2-5.

\(^6\) See fig. 3-4.
In accordance with the headlines, the facial expressions of the advertisements’ male protagonists all betray negative feelings of awkwardness or fear. The question is whether these headline statements are directed at another man or a woman. Looking at the bottom of each advertisement, the tagline reads, “Milk can help reduce the symptoms of PMS” (qtd. in Elliott). Thus, it is immediately evident that the men depicted are supposed to be talking to women suffering from PMS, standing for “premenstrual syndrome.”

This sexist advertising campaign received heavy criticism and was even parodied by the public. For instance, various fictional advertisements modeled after the campaign appeared on the Los Angeles-based comedy website Funny or Die. In one of these parodies, the caption reads, “SHE CAN DRINK IT WHILE—NOT VOICING—HER OPINION,” and the following rhetorical question is raised in the tagline: “CAN YOU BELIEVE THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE?” This example again shows that the reconstruction of an advertisement in order to criticize and satirize the original is a successful form of advertising literacy. Using humor and irony, the creators of the subvertisements draw attention to the mechanisms of gender stereotyping at work in the advertising campaign. Their effort reveals that they were not willing to negotiate their gender equality standards and found the campaign and its sense of humor sexist—even covertly. The result: “Milk Campaign Ended amid Social Media Firestorm,” as another New York Times article by Elliott informed us on July 21, 2011, just ten days after the release of this advertising campaign. In this case, the conflict between advertiser and subverter was effective, forcing the advertisers to reconsider their choices regarding gender depiction.

These milk advertisements may at first seem harmless, but after taking a closer look at them and their parodies, the problematic nature of the advertising messages becomes apparent. In this way, the advertisements are latently rather than blatantly sexist. This form of sexist advertising, in which the problematic aspect is related more to the language than to the image, can be even more dangerous than obviously sexist advertising, such as the advertisements targeted by Rezkallah. When it takes some time to understand the implications of the advertising message, it is generally more difficult to uncover and/or dispute its sexist character.

Conflict between Sexist Advertising and Criticism on Social Media

Another US milk advertising campaign provides a striking example of how critical reactions on social media can affect the development of sexist advertising projects. Coca-Cola’s Fairlife milk advertisements of 2014 depict apparently naked women in sexy positions, covered only in dripping milk. The pictures belong to the project “Milky PinUps” (2014), created by London-based photographer Jaroslav Wieczorkiewicz, available online on his official website AurumLight. It is

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7 Two of these advertisements can be found in Elliott’s articles cited in this essay.
interesting to note that art—in this case, photography—can either criticize sexism in advertising, as in the previous example of Rezkallah’s subvertising project, or foster sexism in advertising, as in the case of Wieczorkiewicz’s project. The photos in the project served as the raw material on which a sexist advertising campaign was founded. Therefore, art in connection to advertising can create conflicts in multiple ways—either through the subversive expression of the artists themselves\(^8\) or the spectators/consumers’ critical reactions to the advertising content.

Apart from the outrageously sexist pictures in the Fairlife campaign, the language used is also quite problematic. “As if the images themselves weren’t insulting enough, th[е] captions [e.g. ‘drink what she’s wearing’ and ‘better milk looks good on you’] enhance the sexist undertones of a message supposedly intended to focus on health and nutrition,” notes The Independent’s Ylva Johannesson in the article “The Fairlife ‘Coke Milk’ Adverts: Do We Really Need Pin-Up Girls to Sell Us Drinks?”\(^9\) As the combination of image and language in the advertisements is rather provocative in its representation of women, it is interesting to read some comments on Twitter related to this representation:

In case you missed: ads for Coke’s new milk brand show nude women, covered in milk, being weighed. #everydaysexism (@danbarker)

Sexist rubbish throwback advertising from Coca-Cola for milk . . . keep the 70s in the 70s! (@rebelgirluk)

CocaCola’s newest brand @fairlife has arguably the worst ad campaign I’ve seen. Women dressed in milk? #Fail #RespectWomen #advertising (@aneeshkamat)

A lesson in how NOT to launch an ad campaign from @CocaCola with their @fairlife milk. A woman on scales?! So bored. (@Tech_Han)

As seen through these comments, social media users expressed their disagreement with the campaign’s depiction of women in the days that followed its release. Their reactions reveal several layers of media literacy. They first recognized the sexist representation of women in the advertisements, and further, were willing to create conflict by sharing their disapproval to raise awareness of the issue.

Clearly, the action of the corporation caused the reaction of the public, which expressed a need to criticize the information transmitted through the media. It is no coincidence that after this severe criticism, Coca-Cola directly retired its advertising campaign in December 2014, as MediaPost’s Karlene Lukovitz reports in “Coca-Cola Pulls Controversial ‘Pin-Up Girl’ Ads for Milk Launch Fairlife.” In this conflict, as in the case of the previously mentioned milk advertisements, the advertiser was forced to relent and withdraw the campaign; otherwise it risked losing potential

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\(^8\) Of course, one must not necessarily be a (highly acclaimed) artist to be able to create a subvertisement. Indeed, the increasing access to user-friendly technological tools enables even an amateur to create a subvertisement. (However, whether the final product is considered art pertains to a different topic of discussion).

\(^9\) Although the advertisements of this campaign can be found in Johannesson’s newspaper article and many other online sources, the Consumer Interaction Center of Fairlife refused to grant me permission to include the images in this paper.
consumers who would not accept an advertising concept that compromised their view of women. However, without the reaction of the consumers, the advertisers would not have needed to rethink their initial decision. Thus, the conflict between advertiser and consumer sheds light on the gravity of sexist advertising and the importance of the public’s response.

As these examples demonstrate, we live in an era of information bidirectionality. In other words, we carry double identities as media receivers and makers. Certainly, not everyone is able or willing to create a fictional advertisement in order to criticize or parody an existing one; owing to its simplicity and practicality, the technique of criticism is much more widespread than the technique of subvertising. Regardless, even a small and seemingly trivial act such as a public post on social media—for example, criticizing a real advertisement or sharing a subvertisement—is a significant way to participate in the process of meaning (re)making in regards to advertising.

Indisputably, mass media are significant makers of meaning; the power of these media and the visibility of corporate advertising in particular cannot be questioned. However, as Zack Furness discusses in his essay “Alternative Media: The Art of Rebellion,” what is needed in order to develop media literacy is the promotion of alternative media, i.e. “non-corporate media that are driven by content, as opposed to profit, and based upon a ‘Do It Yourself’ (DIY) ethic” (189). This can encourage us to envision media “as a means of creative expression, a form of education, and/or a vital component of a democratic society” (190). Of course, alternative media do not share the popularity of mass media, and a subadvertisement or a commentary will therefore probably not be as visible as the actual advertisement. Still, the increasing use of such response techniques signals a turn to a more participatory culture. Stephen Duncombe also highlights the significance of the active participation of media consumers in media production in his book Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture (1997), suggesting that alternative media “challenge the dichotomy between active creator and passive spectator” (127). This kind of participation by consumers is fundamental, as it reminds us that culture is a sum of shaped and shared ideas and practices that we can gradually reshape and re-share.

Conflicts Related to the Translation of Sexist Advertisements

Keeping in mind the previous examples of sexist advertisements and the various ways of subverting them, I will now look at conflicts related to the translation of such materials. First, I will explore the conflict between the advertiser’s focus on financial gain, which can promote sexist elements in advertising, and the feminist translator’s special interest in language use that aims at gender equality. Second, I will focus on the feminist translator’s inner conflict when faced with a commercial translation that may contain sexist elements, and their wish to create an equality-oriented translation.
Conflict between the Advertiser and the Feminist Translator

The general difficulties related to the translation of advertisements into different languages need some mention first. Some of the problem areas related to “intercultural advertising,”\textsuperscript{10} as termed by Hartmut Stöckl in his paper “Werbekommunikation–Linguistische Analyse und Textoptimierung” [Advertising Communication–Linguistic Analysis and Text Optimization] (245), which arise in the translation of advertisements from one language into another, are the following: the “[c]ultural connection of words with \textit{image} elements,” “[l]anguage games and language-\textit{image} games,” and “[l]anguage-dependent \textit{images} ([which are] \textit{images} based on idiomatic expressions)” (245; emphasis added).\textsuperscript{11} The written and/or oral language found in the advertisements needing translation are in most cases inextricably linked to the \textit{images} within the advertisement, whether static or dynamic. Therefore, the power of visual elements in either visual or audiovisual advertising cannot be disputed.

Typically, the image does not change during the translation process (although there are some cases in which this occurs for localization purposes), but the written and/or oral language must change and yet remain in accordance with the original image. Thus, if the original advertisement is \textit{already} sexist, is it possible to create a non-sexist translated advertisement? Is the translator able to choose a so-called “free translation” instead of translating the words literally in order to avoid reproducing sexism in advertising? What if this avoidance contradicts or undermines the advertiser’s initial intent?

To explore these issues, an interesting example of linguistic sexism in international advertising serves as a case study. The 2018 Greek television commercial in question promotes Ronal, an over-the-counter (OTC) medicine produced by the Greek pharmaceutical company Olvos Science, a subsidiary of one of the largest Greek pharmaceutical companies, Galenica. The commercial has enjoyed lasting popularity in Greece and is still regularly aired today. Although the company that produces the aforementioned medicine is the Greek Galenica, its authorized distributor is the German company Merck, which sells an equivalent OTC product named Nasivin. This means that the Greek television commercial has been translated from German. However, to further complicate the situation, the German company Merck has been controlled by the multinational US-based corporation Procter & Gamble—one of the largest US consumer goods companies—since 2018, as Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner until 2019 and Executive Vice-President of the European Commission since 2019, confirms in her 2018 letter “Case M. 8974–Procter & Gamble/Merck Consumer Healthcare Business.” Merck’s Nasivin is mainly distributed in German-speaking countries (e.g. Austria, Germany) and can only be purchased online in the US, as P&G offers the equivalent OTC product Vicks Sinex domestically. Nevertheless, although the commercial was not aired in the US, it is interesting to examine the original German-language commercials from 2016 and 2018 along with the translated English-language and Greek

\textsuperscript{10} In the original: “interkulturell[e] Werbung” (Stöckl 245).

\textsuperscript{11} In the original: “[k]ulturelle Bindung von Wörtern und \textit{Bildelementen},” “Sprachspiele und Sprache-\textit{Bild}-Spiele” and “[s]prachbedingte \textit{Bilder} (\textit{Bilder}, die auf idiomatischen Ausdrücken beruhen)” (Stöckl 245; emphasis added).
commercials, aired in 2017 and 2018 respectively, since the company selling the product is controlled by P&G.

The protagonists of the popular commercials are a sick man, experiencing flu symptoms, and a desperate woman who is trying to take care of him. The man seems to be totally helpless, as he cannot reach for the TV remote control or even for his own cup of tea, as shown in the commercials. Apart from the visual sexism, depicting the man as a child and the woman as a caretaker, an example of linguistic sexism arises here in the creation of a new word: “Männerschnupfen” (Nasivin Commercial 1 00:00:26-00:00:27; Nasivin Commercial 2 00:00:01-00:00:02).\textsuperscript{12} This term is literally translated as “αγοροσυνάχ” (Ronal Commercial 00:00:08-00:00:09) in the Greek commercial and “man cold” (Nasivin Commercial 3 00:00:07-00:00:08) in the English-language commercial,\textsuperscript{13} although the use of the neologism “man flu” is generally more widespread in everyday language; the term is used in a humorous fashion, according to its Lexico and Cambridge Dictionary entries (“Man Flu”).

The Nasivin website provides further advertising content for analysis. One page in particular\textsuperscript{14} displays various images with the protagonists of the commercials as well as a long text divided into three sections with supposedly helpful information for female customers living with male partners. At the end of all three informational sections on “Männerschnupfen” (“man flu”), the following footnote can be found: “The man flu campaign is satirical. Any deviations from reality are solely for comic effect and are not to be seen as defamatory” (The Procter & Gamble Company and Affiliates).\textsuperscript{15} The advertisers want to make clear that the way the product is promoted is supposed to be humorous, and there is no actual intent to insult anyone based on their sex and/or gender. However, would the situation still feel humorous if the sexes were reversed? Would a woman experiencing flu symptoms who needs a male presence to serve her have the same supposedly comic effect? Would “Frauenschnupfen” (“woman flu”) have the same impact? These questions do not derive from strict adherence to political correctness, but are meant to expose the dangers lurking behind gender-related humor in advertising and in everyday life as well as to show that the lightness with which gender stereotypes are dealt with is a serious issue, as this kind of humor continues to contribute to the sustainability of patriarchal societies.

Although sexism in general and sexist humor in particular are typically believed to affect women more than men, a deeper examination of sexist language often reveals negative implications for both women and men. In the case of “Männerschnupfen”/“αγοροσυνάχ”/“man

\textsuperscript{12} The second German-language commercial (Nasivin Commercial 2) has recently been found on a page of the official website of Nasivin by The Procter & Gamble Company and Affiliates (nasivin.com/de_AT/Startseite/mannerschnupfen.html); however, this page is no longer available, probably due to the severe criticism of the particular advertising campaign. (The page is partially accessible here: web.archive.org/web/20190122075440/https://www.nasivin.com/de_AT/Startseite/mannerschnupfen.html).
\textsuperscript{13} The English-language commercial (Nasivin Commercial 3) was produced by the commercial film company Massif, based in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa.
\textsuperscript{14} See Footnote 12.
\textsuperscript{15} In the original: “Bei Männerschnupfen handelt es sich um eine satirische Kampagne. Etwaige Abweichungen von der Realität haben lediglich humoristischen Charakter und sollen nicht diffamierend wirken” (The Procter & Gamble Company and Affiliates).
cold,” this term is used in a sexist fashion against both women and men. It does not merely imply that women are strong and men weak when experiencing flu symptoms. Rather, combined with the visual aspect of the commercial, it implies that men are normally strong, and when they are not (in exceptional cases, like in sickness), women are the ones who must serve them and help them to become strong again. This, in turn, suggests that men are always supposed to be strong, no matter the circumstances. This subtle example nevertheless illustrates how the use of one specific word can have so many implications about the expectations linked to stereotypical gender roles.

Therefore, it is essential to explore alternative solutions to these linguistic problems. For example, the translator of the German-language source text could choose to use only the Greek word “συνάχι” instead of “αγόροσυνάχι” in the Greek target text, and correspondingly the English words “cold” or “flu” alone, instead of “man cold” or “man flu” in the English-language target text. The translation would not be completely faithful to the original text—or to the advertiser’s initial purpose. However, it can be argued that in this case, less is more; the translation strategy of omission or gender neutralization which here results in the loss of the English word “man” or the Greek word “αγόρι” (“boy”) can be seen as a gain against linguistic sexism—a gain against the creation and promotion of terms that foster fixed gendered behavioral traits. Of course, it is not possible to change the already-sexist images in the commercial, but the feminist translator can still promote equality-oriented language through such strategic choices in the translation process.

The Feminist Translator’s Inner Conflict

The previously discussed example of sexist advertising leads us to the final conflict to be addressed. This conflict does not concern two different parties (the advertiser and the feminist translator), but only one—the feminist translator. This conflict, which is very similar to and is influenced by the conflict between advertiser and translator, is the feminist translator’s constant dilemma: Should they create a profit-oriented translation or an equality-oriented translation? Is the combination of both possible, or are these goals incompatible? Is the translation of sexist advertisements inevitably a negotiation process, in which the translator may need to compromise their viewpoint on the importance of gender equality? These are difficult questions to answer, as they depend on various factors, including commercial/financial interests. Indeed, translators of advertisements can sometimes feel lost in translation or, more precisely, “trapped” in translation, as they are de facto in a less powerful position, limited in multiple ways by both image and language.

Nevertheless, translation strategies that can reduce—if not eliminate—linguistic sexism in advertising must be explored, since the attempt to intensify these conflicts can make the problem of sexism in advertising and its translation more visible. The feminist translator, as a mediator of language and culture, should be thoughtful and inventive, always trying to seek creative solutions to improve the representation of both women and men in advertising specifically and in the media in general. Translation scholars have explored solutions to these issues, though they have historically focused mainly on the relationship between gender and literary translation, leaving
non-literary translation on the periphery of scholarly analysis. For instance, in her influential article “Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories,” Luise von Flotow analyzes several feminist translation strategies which she describes as “supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and ‘hijacking’” (74). This last translation technique, “hijacking,” includes the decision not to use masculine terms in a generic fashion, even when such terms are used in the source text (79). Von Flotow discusses these techniques within the framework of the translation of literary texts.

While these techniques are important and might be useful for the translation of non-literary texts in some cases, they are not always applicable. For instance, in the translation of advertisements, “hijacking” could sometimes be an ideal option to reduce sexist language, but prefacing (providing preliminary information) and footnoting (including “the translator’s notes”) are not viable options due to the lack of time or space in advertising for the translator’s explanations. For this reason, other effective feminist translation techniques related specifically to the translation of advertisements should be developed. One possible suggestion that is similar to von Flotow’s “hijacking” is the technique of omission or gender neutralization (if applicable within the context of a particular advertisement). As illustrated in the previous subsection, this technique can help to avoid specific references to one gender which may result in linguistic sexism. In any case, an equality-oriented translator must try to assume the role of a resourceful solution-finder during the process of translating advertisements.

Conclusion

After analyzing the conflicts related to gender in advertising (namely between advertising and subvertising and between sexist advertising and criticism on social media) as well as the conflicts related to the translation of sexist advertisements (namely between the advertiser and the feminist translator as well as the feminist translator’s inner conflict), it is quite difficult to find a categorical answer to questions on processes of negotiation/compromise as regards gender equality in advertising and its translation. However, the constant engagement in these types of conflict is what makes both visual and verbal forms of sexism in advertising evident enough to encourage critical responses to discriminatory/demeaning messages. As a result, we become more aware of the importance of a feminist visual and linguistic representation of both women and men in advertising.

Consequently, all these conflicts—between advertiser and subverter, advertiser and social media consumer, advertiser and feminist translator, and within the feminist translator—are both meaningful and fruitful, especially when realized cumulatively. They can lead to the criticism of sexist advertisements of the past, the direct ban of sexist advertisements at present and/or the avoidance/reduction of such advertisements in the future. It is crucial to make these conflicts visible, as they can impact the world of advertising—whether directly or indirectly—to effect improvement and promote equality.

16 This observation, which is a well-known fact, is also made by Olga Castro and Emek Ergun (eds.) in their 2017 book Feminist Translation Studies: Local and Transnational Perspectives (4).
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Conflicts Related to Sexist US Advertisements and to Their Translation


