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Dynamic Equivalence as a Cultural and Linguistic Strategy in Advertisements

Fahad Abbas

MPhil Scholar, University of Education, Multan Campus, Lahore,
fahadabbas413@gmail.com

Dr. Abdul Ghaffar

Associate Professor of English, Division of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Education, Multan Campus, Lahore, abdul.ghafar@ue.edu.pk

Abstract

This study examines the concept of dynamic equivalence as a linguistic tool in translating advertising slogans in international markets. It compares five international brands like Coca Cola, Intel, Pepsi, Electrolux and American Airlines, to determine how translations maintain the persuasive intent and brand recognition across different cultures. The results demonstrate that dynamic equivalence facilitates the successful Cross Cultural communication where the intended emotional effects are expressed in the translation as observed in Coca Cola's campaign in Pakistan and Pepsi's campaign in India. The case studies of Intel in Brazil, American Airlines in Spanish speaking countries and Electrolux in the United States however show the danger of literal translation resulting in confusion, humor or unintentional meanings. The research concludes that dynamic equivalence provides a very useful concept to preserve brand identity and response among the audience in cross cultural advertising.

Keywords: Advertising Translation, Cross Cultural Communication, Dynamic Equivalence, Global Branding

Introduction:

In the current globalized world, the use of the internet and other information communication technologies, organizations are not restricted to a one language or culture. With brands venturing into various new regions, it is no longer just about translating, but about the effective market communication. Slogans in advertisements specifically are modeled to capture the spirit of a brand within a small set of words and they capture the emotions and

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bring loyalty to a variety of customers. Translation of such slogan is therefore, a very important process in that an improper translation can lead into a distortion of the brand identity or even loss of reputation. Nida theory of dynamic equivalence focuses on the measurement of success in translation as not in fidelity but in how close the response is within a target audience, where effect is more than form (Nida and Taber, 1969).

The importance of translation in the international marketing is relatively well-known, yet the literature that has been published on the subject focuses on either the translation strategy or techniques or on particular cases. Almost no research compares the efforts made by other global brands in the struggle of overcoming the challenge of transmitting the slogans in the different linguistic and cultural contexts. It is a critical gap since the multinational companies exploit the slogans intensively to create a coherent image of the brand and address the needs of the local consumers with the alternative vision. This work on these problem will illuminate the conditions in which the translation strategies are likely to be succeeded or not in meeting the aim of maintaining the objective of the brand.

This research discusses the translation of advertisements of some best global brands in the world such as Intel, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Electrolux and American Airlines. These case studies offer useful information on the success and failure of cross-cultural marketing. The analysis of how these brands have already used translation to communicate and adjust their identities in the various markets and numerous markets evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of dynamic equivalence in advertising, as it functions in moderating the brand consistency and cultural relevance.

This research uses the model of dynamic equivalence given by Nida to go beyond literary translation showing that it is effective in global marketing and brand advertising as a way to transfer meaning and emotional appeal across cultures. It also provides useful contribution for advertisers, copywriters and translators because it describes the ways in which brand equity and cultural resonance can be preserved in different markets using dynamic equivalence and what can go wrong when cultural sensitivity is ignored. Thus, the research bridges a gap in translation theory and advertising practice that is clearly visible and considerably sound in its approach to present an academic and practical understanding of how a language can be invoked to help a brand succeed in an international market.

Research Questions:

1. To what extent does dynamic equivalence contribute to building cross-cultural brand identity, and where does it fall short?
2. What challenges arise when translating idioms, humor, or culturally bound expressions in global brand campaigns under dynamic equivalence?

Literature Review:

Eugene Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence centers on producing a translation that evokes the same response in the target audience as the original text did in its audience. It

prioritizes naturalness and cultural appropriateness over literal word-for-word translation. This approach allows translators to adapt idioms, expressions, and cultural references to make the message clear and impactful in the target language. Dynamic equivalence is reader-oriented and particularly effective for texts requiring emotional or cultural resonance. It contrasts with formal equivalence, which focuses on preserving the exact structure and wording of the source text (Awdi, 2025).

As Ahmedov and Qaxarova (2025) explain that dynamic equivalence depends on careful analysis of meaning at lexical, grammatical, contextual, and pragmatic levels. The goal is to achieve a comparable response in the target audience rather than to copy the surface form. The translator therefore acts as a cultural mediator, selecting expressions that carry the intended effect. For example, an idiom like “kicked the bucket” is better rendered as “passed away” to preserve meaning. The authors also review debates about the subjectivity of equivalence and the limits of judging sameness across languages. They note persistent issues such as variable audience reception and possible loss of stylistic nuance. In advertising, their discussion supports effect driven translation to build cross cultural brand identity while warning that idioms, humor, and culture specific cues require tailored solutions and reception testing.

In a reassessment of Nida’s dynamic equivalence, Kim (2015) argues that effective translation should prioritize the receptor’s response over formal correspondence, using analysis, transfer, and restructuring to clarify meaning into kernels and re-express it for comparable impact. He supports flexible treatment of idioms, colloquialisms, and style to preserve effect, but cautions that excessive accommodation can slide into adaptation and erase source culture. For advertising, this implies audience-tested, functionally equivalent phrasing that builds cross-cultural brand identity while safeguarding nuance in humor and culturally bound expressions.

Translation strategies and techniques are core concepts in Translation Studies that serve different functions. Strategies refer to the translator's overall plan for the text while techniques are specific methods applied to units of language such as words or phrases to carry out the strategy. Harmon (2019) explains that despite debates around the concept of equivalence, it remains essential for preserving the original message's identity across cultures and languages. The author emphasizes that effective translations are those where techniques are consistently chosen to align with a coherent strategy, ensuring the text maintains meaning and function in the target context. Without this alignment and the principle of equivalence, translation theory and practice would lack clarity and direction (Harmon, 2019).

Positioning advertising translation at the intersection of global standardization and local adaptation, Cruz-García (2018) examines when “copy adaptation” counts as translation and concludes that practice is best understood through functionalist approaches that privilege purpose, audience, and effect over strict form. Drawing on shifts from equivalence models to skopos theory, the article shows how campaigns range from literal transfer with high

similarity to partial rewrites and new creative work, and how decisions are shaped by marketing strategies, multimodality, and reception norms. Three ad pairs illustrate a continuum: fully standardized versions with minimal change, globalized versions with selective edits, and localized versions that create new texts while preserving the campaign idea. The key implication for advertising research is to evaluate success by communicative function and market fit rather than surface sameness, while recognizing that adaptation and transcreation remain part of translation when guided by shared intent and effect.

Lim and Loi (2015) demonstrated that readers in Macao rated adapted slogan translations more highly than literal ones, supporting the argument that communicative strategies are more persuasive. Ayadi (2018), analysing English–Arabic slogan translation, found that omission and paraphrase were frequently employed to achieve effect where literal transfer was inappropriate. Together, these studies confirm that equivalence in advertising must be dynamic and functional, not formal.

Cultural context plays a decisive role in how equivalence is realized. Shahriari, Soares, and Simões (2023) showed that in high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures, audiences reject ambiguous slogans, whereas in low-uncertainty contexts, ambiguity may be appreciated as cleverness. This finding undermines the assumption that dynamic equivalence can guarantee comparable responses across contexts: what counts as equivalent effect is itself culturally variable. Consumer-oriented studies have highlighted how translation decisions affect persuasion. Luna and Peracchio (2001) showed that bilingual audiences do not process translated slogans in the same way as originals, implying that literal correspondence is ineffective in shaping memory or purchase intent.

European-focused research has also tested dynamic equivalence in slogan re-contextualization. Polajnar (2016) investigated English slogans translated into several European languages and found that translators frequently departed semantically from the source but preserved rhetorical functions such as rhyme, rhythm, and persuasive appeal. While these findings align with effect-oriented translation, the study stopped short of measuring audience reception, leaving unclear whether rhetorical equivalence translated into actual persuasive outcomes. Similarly, Zhang and Chen (2021) explored luxury brand slogan translation into Chinese, applying Nida's model to evaluate how metaphorical equivalence was achieved. Their findings showed that cultural modification of imagery preserved brand prestige but required significant creative departures from the original. This once again illustrates that dynamic equivalence in practice often overlaps with transcreation, raising the theoretical question of whether the two should be considered distinct or complementary.

More critically, the existing literature remains narrow in scope—most analyses are confined to one brand, one campaign, or one market, and few go beyond descriptive or anecdotal accounts. There is little comparative, cross-regional, or multimodal work, leaving unanswered the question of how equivalence operates across industries and cultures simultaneously. Sambou (2017) analyzed the translation of advertising statements from

French into Wolof in Senegal, showing how functional equivalence guided adaptations that carried connotations rooted in local oral culture rather than strict lexical fidelity. Jiang (2023) examined Chinese luxury advertising through the lens of functional equivalence, finding that successful adaptations required more than literal meaning transfer and instead depended on aligning translated copy with consumer expectations about prestige and lifestyle. Earlier work by Lu (2016) and Han (2018) on Chinese–English advertisements similarly highlighted that equivalence in this field is achieved through strategies such as pun translation, borrowing, and expansion, with each choice reshaping consumer perception of creativity and credibility. From a comparative perspective, Kadirov, Bardakci, and Kantar (2018) investigated Turkish, Russian, and Arabic slogan extensions and demonstrated that the degree of linguistic proximity and the presence of diglossia shaped whether slogans were translated, adapted, or entirely recreated. Together, these studies confirm that functional and dynamic equivalence remain relevant for advertising translation, but also reveal that their application is heavily mediated by local linguistic environments and market expectations.

Methodology:

This research employs a qualitative, comparative case study design to investigate how dynamic equivalence functions as a cultural and linguistic strategy in global advertising slogans. The choice of a qualitative approach is rooted in the interpretive nature of translation studies, where the objective is not merely to quantify linguistic shifts but to analyze how meaning, effect, and cultural resonance are negotiated across contexts. A comparative framework is essential in this study because it allows for the identification of similarities and differences in translation practices across multiple brands and industries, thereby moving beyond the limitations of single-case analyses commonly found in existing literature.

Data Collection

The data collected for this study is based on a purposive sample of internationally established brands like Intel, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Electrolux, and American Airlines. The reason why these brands are chosen is because they are worldly famous, brand identity is clear from their slogans, and their history of successes and failures of translations are recorded both in academia and professional spheres. The advertisement slogans are gathered in their original English forms and their variants which are translated in different markets with a special bias on areas where cultural differences and language barriers present a big challenge in the translation process. The sources are official branded campaign, multinational advertising archives, and corporate websites. Official and popularly printed translations are considered to ensure reliability and prevent unofficial translations or contents made by consumers themselves. The source of secondary data consisted of reception studies, consumer surveys, and industry reports and academic literature.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on the theory of dynamic equivalence, developed by Eugene Nida that constitutes one of the most significant theories in translation studies. Nida points out as the main idea that translation cannot be evaluated based on the literal accuracy to the source text but it must produce a response within the target population that will be functionally identical to the original audience (Nida and Taber, 1969). This receptor-focused method is more naturalistic, culturally responsive and communicatively competent, so it would be especially applicable to the high stakes environment of international advertising when slogans must move people to be loyal, motivate action, and use a few words only to achieve transformation. Dynamic equivalence is used in this research to analyze the performance of advertising slogans translated into various cultural and linguistic backgrounds as an analytical ideology.

Data Analysis

This research utilizes the theory of dynamic equivalence formulated by Nida, concentrated on their attainment of a similar emotional and persuasive impact on the target audience, not on literal translation. An analysis of slogans and their translations is done based on the levels of wording, connotation, cultural context, idioms, and humor to determine the effectiveness of dynamic equivalence in promoting brand perception across cultures. The process of analysis is conducted in three phases. First, descriptive analysis is done to trace both literal and functional features of every translated slogan. Second, a comparative analysis is pursued, in order to determine cross-cultural trends with the use of dynamic equivalence. Lastly, an analysis is made to determine whether the translated slogans brought about a similar impact in target audiences. Triangulation of the results of a textual analysis with secondary data about the reception of the material (published works, critical reviews etc.) is used to support this evaluation. The results can be applied to translation research by providing information on how meaning and emotional effects can be preserved when cross-cultural advertising is utilized. By following this layered approach, the study ensured both textual depth and contextual breadth in examining the strategic role of equivalence in cross-cultural marketing translation.

Limitations

This study is limited to five global brands, which, while diverse in industry, cannot represent the full range of advertising practices worldwide. Moreover, the study does not rely on surveys or experiments, which restricts the ability to measure audience response directly. Nevertheless, the focus on well-documented cases allows for robust comparative insights and provides a foundation for future research that might extend to other industries or involve empirical reception testing.

Analysis:

The study analyzes the collected data of brand slogans and advertisements using Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence. The focus is on examining how meaning and persuasive intent are conveyed across languages at lexical, grammatical, contextual, and pragmatic levels. A brand-wise analysis is presented first, followed by a comparative discussion to identify broader patterns of equivalence in cross-cultural marketing.

1. Coca Cola:

The "Open Happiness" campaign was launched globally by Coca-Cola in 2009 as an integrated marketing strategy aiming to connect consumers emotionally with the brand. The campaign builds on the universal human desire for happiness, optimism, and shared moments of pleasure, targeting a wide audience across cultures while maintaining a clean, simple, and inviting message. The phrase is action-oriented and direct, focusing on the tangible act of opening a Coke bottle that leads to the feelings of happiness and refreshment.



In Pakistan, the campaign was adapted with the slogan “ہو یقین تو کھلیں خوشیاں” which can be translated literally as “If there is faith, happiness will unfold.” This adaptation is a rich case of dynamic equivalence where literal translation takes a back seat to cultural relevance and emotional resonance. Instead of focusing on the literal and physical act of “opening,” this version introduces a condition—“ہو یقین” (have faith)—which adds a layer of cultural meaning linked to trust, hope, and belief. These concepts resonate deeply within the Pakistani cultural and social framework, where faith and optimism are often intertwined with everyday life and social interactions. The latter half of the slogan, “کھلیں خوشیاں” (happiness will bloom/unfold), moves from a momentary act to a broader emotional state, suggesting that happiness is something that grows or flourishes when faith is present. It subtly transforms Coca-Cola from merely a product into a symbol of emotional fulfillment and positive outlook.



The approach is such that it renders the campaign a rather inspirational, and poetic message, as opposed to the actual commercial appeal, which is in line with the language and cultural signification in this region. The Urdu slogan is seen as a poetic, even rather oblique, mode of communication, which is important to the South Asian discourse, which is contrasted to the direct literal English translations.

This demonstrates that successful advertising internationally does not mean adding just some words to different cultures and giving them meaning, but instead re-inventing the brand message in culturally sensitive and emotionally supportive formats. Urdu translation of the Coca-Cola campaign shows that the brand makes people only happy but also convert the happy promise into the culturally relevant dialogue of trust and hope. By this, a strong characteristic of the campaign in Pakistan is that it has been localized so well, but also it did not lose the zeal of the universal, reveals how multinational brand can be stored as developing genuine relations with diverse cultures, familiar with the cultural empathetic and imaginative appropriations of adapting language.

2. Intel:

Intel is one of the strongest technology brands that is being reflective of innovation and forward-looking. Its motto, “*Intel: Sponsors of Tomorrow*” expounds its role of breaking the boundaries of the high technology and enable innovation to create a future. The tagline enhanced the role of Intel as not only a company that produces techs, but as one that is visionary and committed to defining the breakthrough in the future.



However, the application of this slogan in the Brazilian market revealed that there are critical issues which highlights the complexity of global brand communication. The translation of “*Sponsors of Tomorrow*” into the Brazilian Portuguese language was not properly understood and interpreted. Rather than making it appear to be the feeling of certainty in the further growth of Intel, the slogan left behind all the feeling of promise unfulfilled- their art and their promises lay ahead and not the present or their future. It led to a lack of connection because consumers interpreted the brand promises in an ambiguous and evasive manner, and it was the risk to the credibility of a technology firm founded on reliability (Monedero Melendez, 2017).

Intel even changed the slogan to *Apaixonados pelo Futuro* which means *Passion to the future*. It was a massive change in the tone and content. Replacing the word *Sponsors* by *Passion* signaled the change of the direction of the movement the brand was developing and that can be called corporate and passive instead of active and emotional. The new slogan does not simply refer to the act of supporting or sponsoring future but highly encourages it. It is much closer to the Brazilian culture in which the passion and individual involvement are the most important. What is even more so is the fact that it is returning the *Focus* and *Urgency* back to the Intel brand pledge. It is closer to the reality and more dynamic, it is more emotionally approaching and is less ambiguous.



Lastly, the Intel slogan rewrite case study in Brazil clarifies that global branding can only work well when it is critically drawn and sensitively localized. This example shows that the brands should be very responsive to the local cultural processes and become flexible stakeholders, which transform the cultural sensitivity into a competitive advantage. Lastly, cross-cultural communication requires accuracy of words and cultural sympathies resulting to a realistic and genuine global brand narrative, longevity and sustainability.

3. American Airlines:

American Airlines unveiled its *Fly in Leather* slogan that focused on the new luxurious leather seats that they wanted to sell in the International market as a symbol of comfort and exclusiveness as part of their branding strategy. Yet, it did not take that long to succeed before the campaign became a successful study in mistranslation pitfalls when it was introduced to Spanish-speaking markets. It was as translated to Spanish, "*Vuela en Cuero*."

This, unfortunately, carries another connotation when uttered. The fancy tag line will be racy with the addition of "En cueros," which is also said as *en cuero*, meaning naked. This undesirable dual meaning brought shame to the airline and an immediate halt to the delivery of the campaign and a reminder that the language and culture issues can invert even the simplest statements.

The failure here stemmed from overlooking cultural and linguistic contexts. While the literal translation was accurate, but it ignored regional slang and idiomatic possibilities, causing the slogan to convey the opposite of the intended function. This case underscores the crucial role of cultural competence and dynamic equivalence in global marketing, where translations must retain the effect and spirit of the original rather than just the words. The campaign's misstep highlights how not accounting for local interpretations can damage a brand's image and credibility, emphasizing the importance of culturally informed adaptation (Carla, 2011).



This case serves as a sharp reminder that successful international branding requires deep understanding of target cultures beyond language mechanics. Messages must be carefully crafted or adapted to resonate contextually and emotionally. It stresses that literal translation is not sufficient alone; instead, translation coupled with cultural sensitivity is essential to maintain brand reputation and effectiveness across diverse markets.

4. Electrolux:

Electrolux, the Swedish appliance giant, launched their slogan "Nothing sucks like an Electrolux" in the United Kingdom during the 1960s to promote the powerful suction of their vacuum cleaners. The phrase cleverly played on the dual meaning of "sucks" — both the literal function of a vacuum and an informal expression emphasizing superiority. While this tagline was well-received in the UK, Electrolux failed to consider the evolving and more dominant American colloquial use of "sucks," which means "terrible" or "bad." As a result, when extended to the US market, the slogan was misinterpreted negatively, creating confusion and unintended humor which undermined the brand's intended message of quality and effectiveness (Dabitch, 2007).



This example highlights the limitations of literal or static translation in global branding. Electrolux's slogan relied heavily on a pun that lost its positive connotation outside its original market context. The failure to anticipate and adapt to cultural and linguistic differences revealed a gap in dynamic equivalence application. While the phrase succeeded in drawing attention, it did so for unfavorable reasons, illustrating that without careful cultural tailoring, brand messages can backfire and damage reputation.

Overall, the Electrolux case serves as a caution in the importance of cultural and linguistic sensitivity of marketing communication. It serves as a reminder to brands that they have to go beyond intelligent plays with words and make note of how the messages will be received by the localized language usage and cultural experience. Even the minor but essential difference in the meaning of the word suck demonstrates the idea that what would be a huge success at one market will become an absolute failure at the other. This example emphasizes that successful translation will not only need the use of words, but the use of strategy to ensure successful engagement in the global market.

5. PEPSI:

The Pepsi, "You Got the right one, baby, uh huh," slogan started in the early 1990s as an element in their Diet Pepsi campaign in both the United States and Canada. The advertisement was marked by Ray Charles singing a catchy jingle, which immediately became a part of the popular culture, including the powerful line, Uh Huh!, written sensitively on the packaging. This was also improved by the fact that the slogan was given a well-known celebrity who had a distinct voice and personality to credit it with, and that the music coupled with a familiar face could elevate advertising and make it more effective.



Pepsi localised the tagline in Hinglish to an Indian market as Yehi Hai Right Choice, Baby, and developed a mixture of Hindi and English which was able to reach the local language and cultural mood in an incredibly powerful way. The Indian advertisement had local celebrities like Mahima Chaudhary, Amir Khan and Aishwarya Rai and this was not comparable to the American one yet the same basic persuasive message was extracted. It made sense to choose local celebrities and these added to the brand relatability and creditworthiness to the Indian cultural background. Celebrities played a role in bridging the divide between the message of the global brand and the message of the local consumers both in terms of expectations and sympathies in an effective tool in getting more engagement, credibility, and memorability across more than a single country.



The work highlighted how international corporations can attain regularity of message and modify communication to meet cultural backdrops through celebrity endorsement. Celebrities can contribute to making the global campaign emotionally relevant in various settings with local familiarity, social influence, and aspirational value. It focuses on the fact that only the literal translation cannot be enough to make the adaptation of brands successful, but cultural hybridity where the main brand values are interfered with the local features and emotion. The integration improves the global brand perception, and celebration of the regional diversity that results in excellent global interaction and communication with the consumers.

Conclusion:

The findings reveal that, although some of translated slogans preserve the original message with its persuasive intent, but most of them do not fit the cultural context and emotional appeal. Apparently, there existed a tendency, that literal translations were either too difficult to listen to or offensive for the locals. But culturally sensitive translations seemed to reach the concept of dynamic equivalence. This shows that advertising translation must balance between the accuracy in translating the original text and being mindful of the language, culture, values and symbolism of the target culture. This study has explored the use of the dynamic equivalence through negotiations of meaning, persuasion and cultural resonance, in regard to the translating advertisements of multinational brand campaigns. The purpose of the study was not merely to trace the methods used during the process of translation of slogans and promotional texts but to examine whether the process of translation was able to convey the communicative effects that it intended to produce in the original language. The next important implication of the research is that the brand identity is closely linked with the quality of translation that cannot be separated. A slogan that loses its rhythm, humor or power to persuade in translation can distort the image of the brand, whereas a successful translation can boost brand loyalty and strengthen emotional connection. In this sense, the research also contributes to translation studies and marketing scholarship as it demonstrates that the role of translator is not a neutral one mediating between the global and local, but, on the contrary, is an active participant in framing the ways that global brands are received in the local markets. Theoretical contribution of this study is that of expanding Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence from its classic use in literary translation to the world of commercial advertising, and to show how it is useful in formulating persuasive and culturally suitable brand communication in global markets. This application demonstrates the adaptability of Nida's model and how the emphasis on communicative effect is still important in today's globalized and highly commercialized world. Furthermore, the practical contribution is to highlight to advertising practitioners the risks of neglecting cultural equivalency, as well as the possible benefits of using translation strategies that emphasize resonance and relatability over word-for-word accuracy.

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