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TRANSLATING CORPORATE IMAGE. ON TRANSLATIONAL SHIFTS IN MISSION STATEMENTS

Mission statement is a genre of corporate management addressed to a large and diversified group of recipients. The aim of the investigated genre is to persuade them to accept the goals and actions of a corporation. It is the choice of relevant generic and register forms which plays a major role in the accomplishment of aims of a mission statement. Almost any contemporary handbook on management addresses the issue of the function and content of a mission statement. This contrasts with the relatively limited interest of linguists in this genre. The analysis presented below draws mainly on the research made by Priscilla Rogers and John Swales (1990), John Swales and Priscilla Rogers (1995), Piotr Mamet (2005), and Maja Wolny-Peirs (2005). The aim of the study is to investigate how certain translational shifts might alter the corporate image of the company. The analysed discourse features cover grammatical metaphor, lexical choice, omission, as well as syntactic and lexical interference.

1. Introduction: Mission Statement – definition, functions and recipients

The origins of the concept of corporate mission statement may also be traced back, as Wolny-Peirs (2005: 132) rightly indicates, to Levitt's article "Marketing Myopia" (1960). The author claims that "the organization must learn to think of itself not as producing goods or services but as buying clients" (1960:56, italics in the original text; see also Wolny-Peirs 2005: 132).

The appearance of mission statement is also the result of the shift from compulsion to financial reward and then to identification in management theory in practice, as indicated by Galbreith (1985). One should also remember about the concept of excellence in strategic management developed by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman in their book "In search of Excellence" (1982) that gives "importance to qualitative aspects of management, such as values, corporate culture and closeness to the customer" (Adam 1989: 210).

Space limitations make it impossible to make a comprehensive review of definitions of mission statements. Thomas A. Falsey is probably right when he claims “there are probably as many definitions as there are companies” (1989 :3). The genre in question is certainly “a common management tool” (Campbell and Yeung 1990: iii) and “a brief statement of the main purpose of an organization” (Adam 1989:347).

The functions of mission may be found in different areas of corporate management. Rue and Holland (1989 :67) point to the fact that mission statement should affect not only the organization itself but also the environment of the organization.

Mamet (2005) indicates that the functions of mission statements may be found in the following areas:

- Definition and identification of the company’s line of business;
- Creating the corporate image or personality;
- Planning the future of a business;
- Coordination of activities;
- Public relations;
- Motivating the employees;
- Monitoring the activities of a business (Mamet 2005:30-32).

Generally speaking one may say that because of its role mission statements address two groups of recipients. One of them may be found both inside (employees) and outside (stakeholders) of the corporation.

The multiple functions and the variety of recipients form the context determining the linguistic features of mission statements, especially those in the area of their register and generic structure.

John Swales and Priscilla Rogers rightly indicate that mission statements “appear under a variety of labels” (1995:226). In fact many mission statements even those generally considered as typical ones are not entitled as mission statement. The best example is Johnson & Johnson’s *Our Credo* considered by many researchers to be the best mission statement ever written (Supernat 2000: 336). This involves the problem whether a particular text may be treated as a mission statement or not. There are two ways to solve this problem. One of them is to use the researcher’s knowledge to classify the text as a mission statement. This approach is used by Swales and Rogers (1995) as well as Mamet (2005). The other concept is to take into account the intention of the sender of the message and to analyse only those texts which are ‘labeled’ as mission statements. This is the approach used by Wolny Peirs (2005:134). Taking into consideration that the texts containing the lexeme “mission” form a considerable corpus, the latter approach has been applied in this project.

2. The linguistic research on missions statement and its findings

The research on mission statements in terms of management is impossible to cover. The research projects made by Campbell and Yeung (1990, 1991), Foster

(1993), Graham and Havlick (1994), Haschak (1998) or Pearce II (1982, 1987) are only exemplary highlights in this area.

Much less research on mission statements is to be found in linguistics. The major one, as mentioned by Bargiela-Ciappini et al (2007: 62-63, 161-165), is that of Rogers and Swales (1990) and John Swales and Priscilla Rogers (1995). In Poland, the linguistic research on generic and register features of mission statements includes works by Mamet (2005), Mierzyńska and Mamet (2005). Wolny-Peirs (2005) analyses mission statements among other genres in a project concerning the language of success.

Swales and Rogers (1995) indicate the following features of the language of mission statements:

- general, ambiguous, pithy and up-beat language;
- verb forms mostly in the present, imperative and purpose infinitive;
- modal verbs in the un-hedged variety;
- *goals*, *principles* and *values* are among the preferred nouns;
- 'positive' adjectives, e.g. *competent*, *enthusiastic* or *leading* make the texts more attractive (1995:226-227);
- first-person plural pronouns used to foster affiliation and identification (1995:227);
- 'employee denoting' subjects (1995:232).

The stylistic features of the genre as indicated by Wolny-Peirs (2005) include:

- the domination of 'utilitarian' style over the esthetic function;
- readability limited by complex syntax that limits readability;
- official style;
- technical and professional style containing i.e. attributes as the components of 'the language of success'
- nominalization (2005:137).

Mamet's register analysis of mission statements (2005:108-150) confirms the occurrence of items indicated by John Swales and Priscilla Rogers in their study (1995). Apart from that the author indicates that mission statements apply the rules of Plain English as indicated by Plain English Campaign (<http://www.plainlanguage.gov>). Mamet's study also reveals the wide range of registers that appear in missions and that range from general language to language for specific purposes including official language as well as business and technical vocabulary (2005: 108-150).

The scope of findings, or even the discrepancies that one may possibly find in the area of researched data confirm the fact that the authors of mission statements have to draw on a number of linguistic resources in order to provide a text addressing a variety of recipients and performing a variety of functions.

As early as in 1995 Swales and Rogers wrote that mission statement "seems to be patently a growing, rather than a dying, genre" (1995:228). The research made by Mamet in 2005 and the following investigation into the nature of the genre, made 15 years after the observation mentioned above, seem to prove that mission statement is more a thriving than a dying genre.

3. Translational shifts in mission statements

As emphasised by Swales and Rogers (1995:226), mission statements are “carriers of culture, ethos and ideology”. These texts should be perceived as the message sent not only to the company employees, but first of all to the stakeholders, a broad group which encompasses shareholders, suppliers, clients, and also potential clients (Mamet 2009:196). Therefore, retaining the intended corporate image in the translated mission statements is undoubtedly of crucial importance. However, considering the nature of the translational process and the shifts inherent in the transfer process, we might expect that certain choices of the translators may influence adversely the corporate image of the company. Thus in order to account for such shifts, in this part of the paper we shall investigate a number of discursual features such as lexical choice, grammatical metaphor, omission, as well as syntactic and lexical interference, all of which might be detected in translated mission statements.

One of the features that are believed to have a potential of changing the point of view projected by the source text is lexical choice. It is often the strength of powerful connotations attached to seemingly equivalent lexical items which gives the source text and the target text different shades of meaning changing the point of view conveyed. That seems to be the case with the mission statement of Starbucks. Although Polish translation of Starbucks’ mission statement generally does justice to the original in terms of the clarity of message and lightness of form, there is one segment of the target text which might raise some doubts as to the lexical choice. The fragment below shows that phrase *we embrace diversity* has been rendered as *akceptujemy różnorodność*:

(1)

We’re called partners, because it’s not just a job, it’s our passion. Together, **we embrace diversity** to create a place where each of us can be ourselves. We always treat each other with respect and dignity. And we hold each other to that standard.

(<http://www.starbucks.com/about-us/company-information/mission-statement>)

Nazywamy siebie partnerami, bo Starbucks to dla nas nie tylko praca, ale przede wszystkim wielka pasja. **Akceptujemy różnorodność**, by stworzyć miejsce, w którym każdy z nas może być sobą. Zawsze traktujemy siebie nawzajem z szacunkiem i godnością. Wzajemnie wspieramy się w zachowaniu tej zasady.

(http://starbucks.pl/pl/_About+Starbucks/Mission+Statement.htm)

These two lexemes (*embrace* and *akceptować*) appear to have different connotations. An inherent feature of the meaning of the lexical item *embrace* is enthusiasm, which is reflected in its dictionary definitions (“to accept something enthusiastically” — “Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary” 2003:398; “to accept readily or with a good grace” — “The New Shorter Oxford English Dic-

tionary” 1993: 805; “to accept or believe an idea willingly and enthusiastically” — “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary” 1995: 376). The Polish lexical item *akceptować* is defined as „wrażać zgodę na coś co uważa się za dobre; aprobować” and „godzić się z czymś czego nie można zmienić” („Uniwersalny Słownik Języka Polskiego” 2003: 33). This definition indicates that this lexeme has a neutral or even a negative connotation in Polish in contrast to the English *embrace* which has a distinctly positive connotation. This particular translational shift clearly alters the image of the company. Target-text audience perceives the company as merely tolerating diversity rather than having a highly positive attitude towards it, which is explicitly stated in the source text. The translator’s decision to choose *akceptować* as an equivalent of *embrace* was probably a difficult compromise between a natural collocation (*akceptować różnorodność*) or transforming the whole segment in order to express the idea of the source text.

Another linguistic mechanism which might alter the point of view in the target text is grammatical metaphor, the concept propounded by Halliday (1985/1994) within his framework of Systemic Functional Grammar to refer to an alternative lexicogrammatical realization of a semantic choice. Jędrzejko (1993) emphasises that metaphorical constructions and their congruent equivalents should never be perceived in terms of a mere variance in syntactic form, since different structuralisations might be referring to the same entities but do not communicate the same. Variation in a lexicogrammatical realization is generally associated with differences in interpretation and different discourse and stylistic effects (Sušinskiene 2004). According to Halliday (1985/1994), the most powerful resource for creating grammatical metaphor is nominalisation, i.e. substituting verbal constructions with nominal ones. By means of such transformation, processes and properties (congruently worded as verbs and adjectives respectively), are reworded metaphorically as nouns, which makes the resulting construction more abstract, impersonal and increases its lexical density. The manipulative potential of nominal constructions is also frequently underscored in other works (e.g. Fairclough 1989, Fowler 1991, Hodge & Kress 1993). As underscored by Puurtinen (2000, 2003), by means of nominalisation, the situation is perceived as more abstract and static, subjective opinions as generally accepted point of view, processes are presented as states, and the role of the agent is less conspicuous (cf. Gumul 2006, Gumul & Łyda 2010). This seems to be the case with the mission statement of Armstrong, in which the verbal form *delivers on its promises* has been rendered by means of a nominal and thus impersonal form *dotrzymywanie obietnic*. These seemingly innocent, and most probably unintentional, syntactic transformation does alter the point of view projected by the source text. The choice of the nominal construction obscures the agenthood and makes the statement more abstract and static:

(2)

We want Armstrong to be a company that **delivers on its promises**. That means we deliver on our promises to our customers, our suppliers, our coworkers, and our communities.

This vision of Armstrong has been consistent throughout our history. Since 1864 when we made medicinal corks and marked each one with our circle “A”, the name Armstrong has stood for quality, innovation and integrity. “Let the buyer have faith” summarizes our commitment to quality.

(<http://www.armstrong.com/commclgeu/eu1/uk/rw/vision-mission-value.html>)

Pragniemy, aby **dotrzymywanie obietnic** było znakiem rozpoznawczym firmy Armstrong. Oznacza to, że dotrzymujemy obietnic w stosunku do naszych klientów, dostawców, naszych współpracowników, i działów, z którymi kooperujemy. Wizja ta towarzyszy nam od początku istnienia naszej firmy. Począwszy od 1864 roku, kiedy to rozpoczęliśmy wytwarzanie korka leczniczego, którego każda partia oznaczona była naszym symbolem: wpisaną w okrąg literą „A”, nazwa Armstrong pozostaje synonimem jakości, innowacyjności i uczciwości. Nasze hasło „Sprawmy, żeby kupujący nam zaufali” wyraża nasze zaangażowanie w utrzymanie jakości produktów.

(<http://www.armstrong.pl/commclgeu/eu1/pl/pl/vision-mission-value.html>)

One of the translational shifts that changes the company corporate image in the most obvious way is omission of certain elements of the original mission statement. In the case of Deutsche Bank it is the whole paragraph that is omitted in the target-language version:

(3)

We compete to be the leading global provider of financial solutions, creating lasting value for our clients, our shareholders, our people and the communities in which we operate.

Our mission gives our business a clear purpose and direction. It is rooted in our brand. Our brand captures and projects a clear idea of who we are. It is something against which all our activities – products, services, behavior and communications – can be judged. It is simple, succinct and unequivocal.

(http://www.db.com/en/content/company/mission_and_brand.htm)

Misją Deutsche Bank jest świadczenie najwyższej jakości usług finansowych skierowanych do wymagających Klientów indywidualnych i biznesowych oraz kreowanie trwałej wartości zarówno dla naszych Udziałowców, Pracowników oraz społeczności, w których działamy.

(<http://www.db.com/poland/index.htm>)

Omission is a frequent strategy in the translation of mission statements as it is apparently a part of the customization procedure, which is frequently adopted when a company enters another market. Such omissions are nevertheless bound the change the corporate image.

Omission in this particular case has an additional impact on the perception of the company. In the fragment which was rendered into Polish, there a clear shift in the rhetoric of identification. Collective forms such as *we* and *our*, which are supposed to „eliminate all kinds of divisions and stress teamwork together with shared feelings and duties, responsibilities and benefits” (Roger & Swales 1990: 301, cited in Mamet 2009: 205) are substituted by far more detached third-person forms. Since the omitted segment abounds in the collective forms (*our mission, our business, our brand, our brand, who we are*), its elimination serves to reinforce the substantially weaker rhetoric of identification in the target-language version. A similar shift can be detected in the mission statement of Armstrong, in which a phrase implying direct involvement *in everything we do at Armstrong* is rendered by means of an impersonal, detached and substantially more official *w każdym przedsięwzięciu firmy Armstrong*.

(4)

Our vision, mission and values play a role **in everything we do at Armstrong**. The decisions we make, the interactions we have with customers and suppliers, the way we work with other departments...all are shaped by vision, mission and values.

(<http://www.armstrong.com/commclgeu/eu1/uk/rw/vision-mission-value.html>)

Nasza wizja, misja i wartości odgrywają kluczową rolę **w każdym przedsięwzięciu firmy Armstrong**. Decyzje, które podejmujemy, współpraca, którą rozwijamy z klientami i dostawcami, sposób, w jaki współpracujemy z innymi działami naszej firmy – wszystkie te elementy są kształtowane przez naszą wizję, misję i wartości. (<http://www.armstrong.pl/commclgeu/eu1/pl/pl/vision-mission-value.html>)

The last category we shall discuss are translational errors, which obviously have a detrimental effect on the company’s corporate image as they diminish its credibility. The notion of a translational error is a fairly complex one and encompasses a variety of text modifications. However, due to space limitations, we will focus on a few cases, in which lack of equivalence can be noticed.

The fragment of Carlsberg’s mission statement presented below shows lack of equivalence at the lexical level. The phrase *we are (...) trustworthy in what we do* has been rendered as *wierzymy w wartość tego co robimy*.

(5)

Innovative in our approach.

We create excitement among consumers, customers and employees.

Ambitious when setting targets.

We are daring when pushing for results.

Responsible in our actions.

We value strong relationships with consumers, customers, employees and partners.

Honest.

We are proud of our company and **trustworthy in what we do.**

(<http://www.carlsberggroup.com/COMPANY/STRATEGY/Pages/MVV.aspx>)

Innowacyjność w szukaniu rozwiązań.

Budujemy pozytywne emocje pomiędzy konsumentami, klientami, a pracownikami firmy.

Ambicje w określaniu celów. Jesteśmy odważni zmierzając do osiągnięcia jak najlepszych wyników.

Odpowiedzialność w naszych działaniach.

Cenimy bliskie związki z naszymi konsumentami, klientami, pracownikami i partnerami.

Szczerłość.

Jesteśmy dumni z naszej firmy i **wierzymy w wartość tego, co robimy.**

(<http://www.carlsbergpolska.pl/grupa/misja>)

The lexical item trustworthy is defined as „able to be trusted as being honest, safe, or reliable” (MacMillan English Dictionary 2002:1543) and „deserving of trust or confidence; reliable” (The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 1993: 3412). Its Polish equivalents are *godny zaufania*, *wiarygodny*, *solidny* and definitely have nothing to do with believing in the value of what the company is doing, an intention which is declared in the Polish version of this mission statement. Similarly, the equivalent *uczciwość* rather than *szczerłość* should be used in the part, in which the company declares honesty.

Another case of misused equivalents in the translation of the mission statement of Messergroup:

(6)

(...) Through entrepreneurial flair, farsighted thinking and the continuous improvement of our processes, we create **added value** for our customers and so secure our mutual success in the long term.

(...) We are focused on the individual requirements of our customers and help them to **improve their competitiveness and their performance.**

(...) Responsible behaviour. We take our **social responsibilities** towards our employees and to society very seriously.

(...) **Corporate responsibility.** By responsibly managing our resources and **applying the talents of our employees** we are increasing the worth of our company in the long term.

(http://messengergroup.com.de/Ueber_Messer/Vision_mission/index.html)

(...) Dzięki przedsiębiorczemu działaniu, przewidującemu myśleniu i stałemu ulepszaniu naszych procesów zwiększamy **wartość dodatkową** dla naszych klientów i zapewniamy długofalowy wspólny sukces.

(...) Koncentrujemy się na indywidualnych zapotrzebowaniach naszych klientów i pomagamy im we **wzmocnieniu ich konkurencyjności i wydajności.**

(...) Odpowiedzialne działanie. Jesteśmy świadomi naszych obowiązków wynikających z **socjalnej odpowiedzialności** względem naszych współpracowników i społeczeństwa.

(...) **Odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorcza**. Dzięki odpowiedzialnemu postępowaniu z naszymi zasobami i **zastosowaniu talentów naszych współpracowników** zwiększamy trwale wartość rodzinnego przedsiębiorstwa.

(http://www.messergroup.com/ee/Elme_Messer_Gas/vision_pl/index.html)

Added value has been translated as *wartość dodatkowa* instead of *wartość dodana*. *Added value* refers to “the increase in worth of a product or service as a result of a particular activity. In the context of marketing, the added value is provided by features and benefits over and above those representing the core product” (http://tutor2u.net/business/marketing/glossary_a.htm), whereas the English equivalent of *wartość dodatkowa*, i.e. *surplus value*, the term deriving from Marxist theory, is more narrowly defined as “the difference between what it costs to make a product and the amount of money it can be sold for” (<http://lexicon.ft.com/term.asp?t=surplus-value>).

Another feature of the translation of this mission statement is the incorrect collocation *wzmacniać konkurencyjność i wydajność* in the place where we should rather expect the verb *podnieść/podnosić* which forms a natural and frequent collocation with the lexeme *wydajność* and appears to be an acceptable solution when it co-occurs with *konkurencyjność*. *Socjalna odpowiedzialność* also appears to be a distinctly unnatural collocation. The target text would probably read better if we omitted the adjective *socjalny*, which appears to be redundant in this context, or rendered this segment as *odpowiedzialność za bezpieczeństwo socjalne*. The equivalents *odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorcza* and *zastosowanie talentów*, both apparently resulting from lexical interference, raise similar doubts. *Odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstwa* or *rzetelność w prowadzeniu przedsiębiorstwa* appear to be more appropriate solutions in the case of a former one, while the latter could possibly be translated as *wykorzystanie potencjału*.

4. Conclusions

Since the aim of the article was to indicate potential pitfalls in the translation of mission statements, rather than engage into a quantifiable research, the exemplification presented above is naturally far from exhaustive. Yet, it can be inferred from the above presentation of translational shifts that certain choices of a translator might affect the company's corporate image. Mission statement is the document which is by definition made public. It attests to the company's credibility and as such should be translated with utmost care in order to avoid translational solutions which might adversely affect its corporate image.

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