

# Translators and Advertisers as an Accomplice in the Objectification of Women in Advertising

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## Abstract

The study was carried out to find out whether women are objectified in the source language (English) verbally and non-verbally, and evaluate and assess the advertisers and translators' role in objectification of women in the target language (Turkish). To evaluate the objectification of women in the source and the target languages scientifically, the researcher developed a scale consisting of 16 items, which analyse any advertisement in terms of verbal and non-verbal objectification. To ensure reliability and validity, four experts' opinion as to the items of the scale was resorted and statistical analysis was carried out before it was applied to. *Magnum ice cream*, *Toyota*, *Efes Zilli Sally & Delikanlı Harry*, *Game of Sultans* and *L'Oréal Paris skin* cream commercials were analysed verbally and non-verbally in two languages. The results of the study show that in both languages, women are extensively objectified and in some advertisements, the physical beauty of women was dehumanized and even reached to the border of pornography.

**Keywords:** objectification of women, advertisements, translation studies, commercials, objectification checklist, globalization

## 1. Introduction

In our ever-globalizing world, virtually everything is being materialized and nothing is immune to this prevailing (dis)order in which roughly everything and everybody has a price to buy and sell. The proliferating opportunists never miss any chance to capitalize on everything even on human bodies and souls at all cost. Presumption of innocence for humanity has been violated on many occasions. Advertising has been playing a pivotal role in turning the world into a uniformed place with no defined boundary and soul at least culturally. Advertising has an ultimate aim: to promote goods and sell it at any cost. In a competitive advertising word, the end justifies the means as in politics. Therefore, to gain consumers and profits, the actors in the ruthless advertising word exploit whatever they have in their stock. The allure of women for the advertisers has always been exploited. In terms of their approaches to women, advertising industry is coined as 'important and pervasive' on the hand as 'problematic and often unaccepted' (Kates & Garlock, 1999, p. 34). However, some studies suggest that the feminist critique of advertising for depicting women as sex objects may not be a universal phenomenon (Frith et al., 2005). Some studies have extensively studied the sexuality and objectification of women in advertisements. They unanimously concluded that women are generally demeaned and treated as sexual objects to promote the products advertised (Jhally, 1989; Kilbourne, 1999; Zimmerman, 2001; Alexander & Judd, 1978; Richmond & Hartman, 1982; Attwood, 2004; Szymanski & Carr, 2011; Kumar, 2017; Lindner, 2004; Lin, 2008; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008; Reichert et al., 2007). Objectification of women refer to the notion that a woman's complete body or a part of her body is singled out or foregrounded to foster desire for the sake of gaining customers. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Bartky (1990) offered similar description about it. More than men women are depicted in objectified manner in commercials and advertisement, wearing provocative dresses, revealing some parts of their bodies, offering sexual readiness in a male dominated advertisement sector. However, on some occasions, women are objectified in advertisements even if they are in a 'decent' clothing. They are portrayed as home bound, husband bound even children bound in advertisements. Therefore, these portrayals should be regarded as objectification of women. This study aims at developing a checklist that could help to evaluate objectification of women, revealing how women are objectified in the source language verbally and non-verbally and discussing the role of translators in objectification of women in the target language. In context

of the aim of the study, the following hypothesis have been put forward and they will be discussed in the lights of the findings and literature:

- 1) In the source language (English), women are sexually exploited verbally and non-verbally in commercials;
- 2) While translating an advertisement into the target language (Turkish), the translators and advertisers act as an accomplice in exploiting women verbally and non-verbally.

## 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

### 2.1 Advertisements and Translation Studies

In translation studies, translation of advertisement is important. However, few theoretical and practical studies have been carried out regarding it. The translation of advertisements is closely related to text types. Bühler (1934), Reiss (1971, 2004), Jakobson (1960) and Ogden and Richards (1946) studied functions of language and text types. According to their classification, advertisements are operative texts which are characterized by appellative in language function, persuasive and creative in language style, appellative in text focus, inductive in equivalent response and textual in translation level. In advertisement translation, verbal and non-verbal messages of the text should be conveyed effectively to the target language for an equivalent effect. In Translation studies, advertisement translation is related to functional theories. According to these approaches, a source text offers information from which translators leach what is necessary (Vermeer, 2004; Nord, 1997; Reiss, 2004; Manttari, 1984; House, 2015). Translators have an important role in functional theories, as they are responsible for creating the equivalent effect of the source text on the target audience. In the context of advertising, women are usually demeaned and exploited as sex object to sell the product and the translators are expected to create the same equivalence effect in the target language. That is, they are expected to be an accomplice for the crime committed in the source language.

### 2.2 Assessment of Advertisement

Advertisements consist of two main elements: a visual and accompanying text(s) to it. Therefore, while assessing any advertisements in any respect, these two elements should be taken into consideration. An advertisement more than any other text includes non-linguistic elements, which pose a threat to any translator who is usually used to transferring linguistic elements. An advertisement uses predominantly non-verbal elements such as colours, numbers, gestures and fonts (Aso, 2012; Scott, 1994; De Mooij, 2011; Barthes, 1985). As an advertisement blends linguistic and non-linguistic elements to convey its message, a pragmatic assessment tool was developed to answer the hypothesis of the research. Pragmatics in linguistics, how utterances are used and how they are related to each other and to the context are of primary importance. In pragmatics, the relation between the meaning and non-verbal elements is very important (Leech, 1983). In literature, assessment of nonverbal elements and its relevance to verbal elements as in the case of advertisement has been little studied. Therefore, through this study, an assessment model was developed to assess the relevance between verbal and non-verbal elements in advertisement in the source text and the target text to test the hypothesis of the study in terms of pragmatics. A woman is coined as a sex object if her sexuality is being exploited to promote a product. Therefore, some criteria were established to test whether a woman is used as an object or not. In some cases, the women are not portrayed sexually; however, they are portrayed as submissive and inferior even slaved to the power of the men and norms of the societies. Therefore, they are regarded as the benchmarks of objectification of women, too. These benchmarks of the objectifications are classified as non-verbal and verbal as follows.

#### 1) Non-Verbal Benchmarks of Objectification

*Size:* Women are overshadowed by men and the objects around them. Women are portrayed nothing but as a decoration in the advertisement.

*Super ordination of men:* Men are portrayed as a superordinate identity in the advertisement. Men are usually portrayed as a boss and a manager embodying power.

*Unnatural famine gestures and movement:* The woman is portrayed touching herself, her lips and her hair sexually suggestive and unnatural way.

*Subordination of women:* The woman is portrayed canting a part of body or her whole body, restricting to move, being embraced by a man, boss or another woman.

*Body exposure of women:* The women are portrayed to wear little or no clothes at all.

*Reduction of women to a place:* Women are portrayed as homebound, husband bound, or children bound.

#### 2) Verbal Benchmarks of Objectification

*Offensive language:* Some texts include humiliating language for women.

*Violence and rape inducing language:* Some texts include a kind of language that promotes violence and rape against women. They also include some weaponized expressions and verbal abuse.

*Culturally embedded humiliating language:* Some cultures have a rooted offensive language used for women. Advertisements sometimes resort to them.

By taking the items above, a Yes/No checklist was prepared to assess the advertisement in both source language and target language. Before it was applied, a judgment of opinion was taken from four experts and their statistical analysis was presented in Method section.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Data Collection Instrument

To assess the advertisements in terms of objectification of women, the yes/no checklist with 16 questions was used (see Table 1). The instrument was prepared to analyse the advertisements in terms of objectification of women. The four experts with Ph.D. degree in Communication and advertisement were requested to comment on the items before being applied. The statistical analysis of their replies was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluation form as to objectification of women in advertising

	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Percent Agreement
A. Items of assessment for non-verbal elements					
1. The woman is portrayed in a sexually readiness position.	1	1	0	1	75%
2. The woman is portrayed with legs spread open in a sexually suggestive way.	1	1	0	1	75%
3. The woman is portrayed as embracing, hugging or caressing herself or others unnaturally.	1	1	0	1	75%
4. The woman is portrayed with a sexually suggestive red lipstick make up.	1	1	0	1	75%
5. The woman's parts of bodies such as breasts, hips, buttocks, lower abdomen, or inner thighs are foregrounded in a sexually suggestive manner.	1	1	0	1	75%
6. The woman is portrayed as finger biting and sucking in a sexually suggestive way.	1	1	0	1	75%
7. The woman is portrayed as decoration with no relation to the product advertised.	1	1	1	1	100%
8. The women are shown to be vulnerable and submissive to men.	1	1	1	1	100%
9. There is physical innuendo against women.	1	1	1	1	100%
B. Items of assessment for verbal expressions					
1. The advertisement includes verbal innuendo against woman.	1	1	1	1	100%
2. The advertisement includes expressions which glamorize violence and rape.	1	1	1	1	100%
3. The text includes expressions implying sex discrimination against women.	1	1	0	1	75%
4. The text includes some part of speech (adjective, nouns and verbs) offensive for woman.	1	1	1	1	100%
5. The text includes some expressions which imply submissiveness of women.	1	1	1	1	100%
6. The text includes joke or pun which refer to female inferiority/inadequacy.	1	1	1	1	100%
7. The text includes some gender-based cultural expressions to humiliate women	1	1	1	1	100%

Table 2. Contingency coefficient value among the experts

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.607	.000
	Cramer's V	.607	.000
	Contingency Coefficient	.519	.000
N of Valid Cases		64	

To analyse the agreement rate among the experts, the percent agreement and contingency coefficient were calculated. According to Table 1 and Table 2, the items of the checklist can be used to evaluate the advertisements as contingency coefficient was found to be .519.

#### 3.2 Materials

To evaluate the objectification of women, five advertisements which include both visual and non-visual elements in English and their translated versions were chosen. The first commercial is *Toyota car* (<https://bit.ly/2nyEwzy>/<https://bit.ly/2IU8ptN>) advertisement in English and its translated version in Turkish. The

second material is *Magnum* ice cream commercial in English and in Turkish ([https://bit.ly/2nuDk0e\\_/](https://bit.ly/2nuDk0e_/) <https://bit.ly/2lToikc>). The third one is *L'Oréal Paris* skin cream commercial in English and Turkish (<https://bit.ly/2nuEFnM/> <https://bit.ly/2lUH3Uq>). The fourth one is a computer game called *Game of Sultans* in both Turkish and English (<https://bit.ly/2lR0jlE/> <https://bit.ly/2lUH3Uq>). In addition, the last one is a beer advertisement called *Delikanlı Henry & Zilli Selly* in both English and Turkish.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Each advertisement was analysed through the checklist developed by the researcher. Frequency table was prepared through SPSS. In addition, descriptive textual analysis was provided comparatively.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 The Overall Findings as to the English Commercials and Their Translated Versions in Turkish

The findings related to the five commercials and their translated versions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The distribution of objectifications items used in commercials in English and their translated versions in Turkish

		Commercials in English		Commercials in Turkish	
		Not include	Include	Not Include	Include
Non-Verbal Items	1. The woman is portrayed in a sexually readiness position.	2	3	2	3
	2. The woman is portrayed with legs spread open in a sexually suggestive way.	4	1	4	1
	3. The woman is portrayed as embracing, hugging or caressing herself or others unnaturally.	4	1	4	1
	4. The woman is portrayed with a sexually suggestive red lipstick make up.	3	2	3	2
	5. The woman's parts of bodies such a as breasts, hips, buttocks, lower abdomen, or inner thighs are foregrounded in a sexually suggestive manner.	2	3	2	3
	6. The women is portrayed as finger biting and sucking in a sexually suggestive way.	2	3	2	3
	7. The woman is portrayed as decoration with no relation to the product advertised.	2	3	2	3
	8. The women are shown to be vulnerable and submissive to men.	2	3	2	3
	9. There is physical innuendo against women.	5	0	5	0
Verbal Items	1. The advertisement includes verbal innuendo against woman.	4	1	3	2
	2. The advertisement includes expressions which glamorize violence and rape.	4	1	3	2
	3. The text includes expressions implying sex discrimination against women.	3	2	2	3
	4. The text includes some part of speech (adjective, nouns and verbs) offensive for woman.	4	1	3	2
	5. The text includes some expressions which imply submissiveness of women.	4	1	3	2
	6. The text includes joke or pun which refer to female inferiority/inadequacy.	2	3	1	4
	7. The text includes some gender-based cultural expressions to humiliate women	4	1	3	2

Table 3 clearly displays that overwhelmingly the advertisements analysed-whether in English or their translated version-serve for objectification of women. The item 9 only indicates that, the commercials do not include a physical innuendo against women. The items of non-verbal assessment 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8, are observed dominantly. The items of verbal assessment 3, 6, are observed dominantly. As far as the verbal items are concerned, it was observed that the translated versions of the advertisements include more innuendo compared to the commercials in the source language.

### 4.2 Descriptive Analysis of the Commercials

In this section, the advertisements were analysed comparatively in terms of objectification of women in the source language and the target language.

#### 4.2.1 Comparative Analysis of Commercial 1

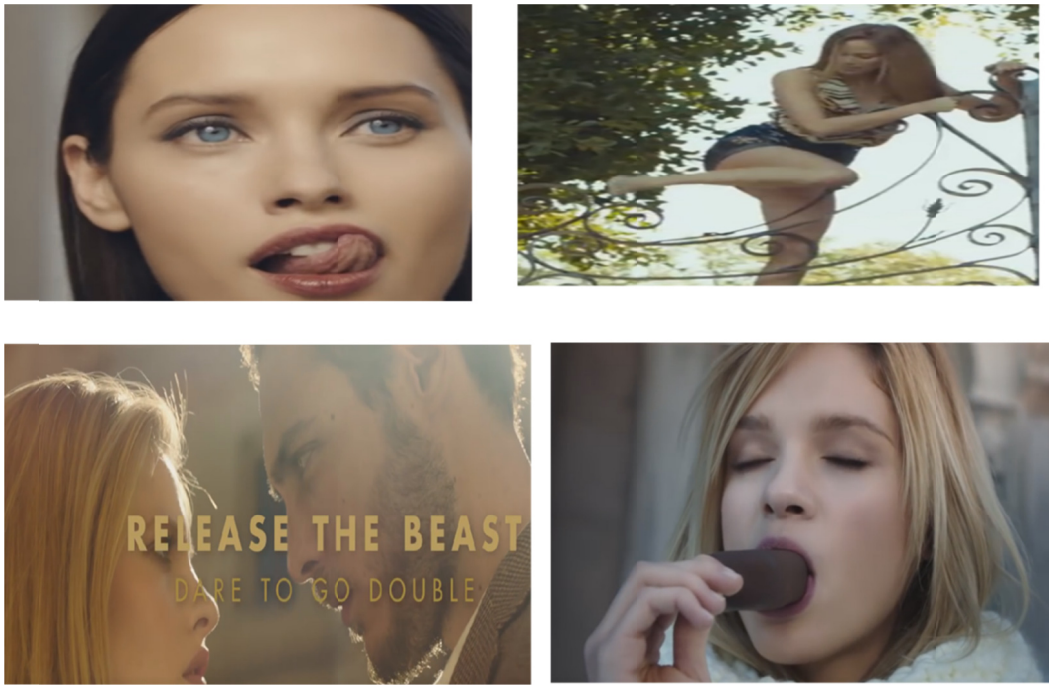


Figure 1. The objectification of women in Magnum ice cream commercial

The 2.4-minute-long Magnum advertisement embodies how women can be objectified. In the ad, the women are portrayed only for their sexual gratification. In Figure 1, the women are displayed as sexually ready and as a decoration accompanying the commodity being advertised. The women's parts of bodies are foregrounded in sexually suggestive manner. Even the crunching sound in 5 sec. and 2 minutes 05 seconds in the video suggest sexuality.

In the translated version of commercial, the same commercial was used. The verbal content was translated into Turkish. The verbal messages and their translated version were given in Table 4.

Table 4. The verbal messages in Magnum commercial and their translated version in Turkish

English	Turkish
Release the beast	İçindeki seni serbest bırak
Dare to go double	Fazlasına cüret et
for pleasure seekers	haz peşindeysen

In the source text, the message *release the beast* was translated into Turkish as *içindeki seni serbest bırak*. The translator used literal translation strategy for the word *release*. However, she/he did not use literal translation strategy for the word the *beast*, as the beast in Turkish culture does not have a good implication. In the first and the second message, the message was localized by making changes linguistically and extra linguistically in accordance with the receptors (Turkish audience) expectations. In the third message, the translators did not localize it. However, she/he employed the word 'haz' which is equivalent to 'lust' as the context of the advertisement tries to sell the product through sexual implicates.

#### 4.2.2 Comparative Analysis of Commercial 2



Figure 2. Advertisement of a beer brand

In original advertisement, the advertisers used *Sally* for the beer for women and *Henry* for men. However, for the productions being sold in Turkey, the word *zilli* was used to denote *Sally*. Likewise, the word *delikanlı* was used to denote *Henry*. The word *Zilli* has bad connotations such as *indecent* and *immoral* women. However, the word *delikanlı* has good connotations such as a man of integrity. The translators and advertisers used a kind of pun or joke that completely dehumanizes and dignities women. Beers are almost culture-free products. However, the translators and advertisers turned it into a culture-bound product. The wrong localization translation strategy aroused a revolt against this brand in Turkey. As the translators and advertisers were unaware of the values of Turkish culture, they humiliated the Turkish women. This advertisement strategy can exemplify how important to know the culture of other nations even when culture free products such as beers are launched onto market.

#### 4.2.3 Comparative Analysis of Commercial 3



Figure 3. A female character in Game of Sultan



*Game of Sultans* was released to Google play and the Apple store in 2018. In the play, you can build an empire with charming consorts. Both with respect to verbal and in non-verbal, it includes a myriad of degrading messages against women. Some degrading expressions and its translations are given in Table 5.

Table 5. The messages in the *Game of Sultans* and their translated versions

I hope this can last forever	Bizim oraların kadınları nazlıdır
I feel so safe in your arms	Gönül yarası çabuk iyileşmez
Show me your desires	Yeterkigel hayatımın anlamı
Come to my arms my darling	Sana gerçek aşkı vereceğim
Come into my room	Beni tanı ve keşfet

In this game, in the source and target languages, women are grossly belittled. Women are treated as commodities to be bought and sold. Women are regarded as nothing but a means of lust. As far as translation strategies are concerned, the translators translated not language but the culture. The translators make use of adaptation and localization techniques to translate the message. In both messages, women are grossly objectified. The sentences such as *show me desires*, *come to my room*, *bizim oraların kadınları nazlıdır* and *Sana gerçek aşkı vereceğim* are sexually suggestive.

#### 4.2.4 Comparative Analysis of Commercial 4



Figure 4. Toyota corolla commercial

The 30-second video exhibits that two men drivers came across an attractive damsel in distress waiting helplessly adjacent a 'broken-down' Corolla. However, one of the drivers, realizing that it was a trap, hightail it, saying that 'it was a trap. Have ever seen a Corolla broken down' by attributing to its reliability. However again, in this advertisement, women are presented as a sexual object virtually. By using the word *trap*, it was implied that women could trap men by using their beauty. In this advertisement, women's 'unreliability' and the car's reliability are contrasted. When the mask was off, an ugly man appeared, implying that women are hiding an ugly face. In Turkish version, the same commercial was used. The expression 'it was a trap. Have ever seen a Corolla broken down' was translated as 'Bu tuzaktı. Toyotanın yolda kaldığını hiç gördünmü?' The translator employed literal translation strategies to translate the message.

#### 4.2.5 Comparative Analysis of Commercial 5

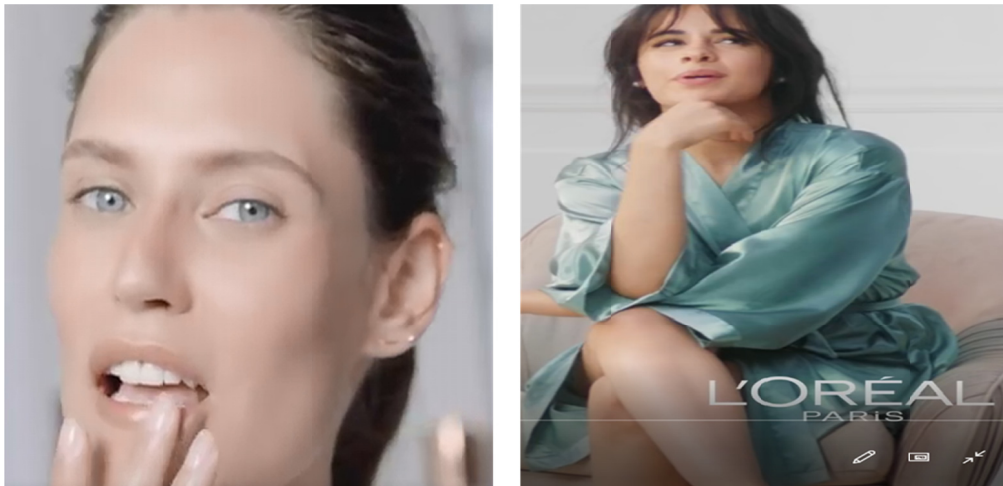


Figure 5. L'Oréal Paris skin cream commercial

The 20-second video is about L'Oréal Paris skin cream. As in all beauty products, attractive women were used to promote the production.

In the 18-second video in the source language, as in many other beauty commercials, a charming, young woman that almost everyone can envy was used. Compared to the other commercials, women's sexuality was not foregrounded. However, beauty and cleanness were presented as if they are only women's concern and there is no place for ugly women in the world. In the Turkish form of the commercial, although the cream can be applied to faces, the whole body of the women is exposed.

In translation, the translators and advertisers did not stick to the original text. The translators localized and adapted the message. For example, they used 'şekerli peelingimi kahveli alabilirmiyim?' They used coffee with sugar collocations to emphasize the product consists of sugar and coffee. They translated *baby face* as *bebeksi pürüzsüzlük* by adapting the message. The translator did not translate the words *dullness*, *rough skin*, and *impurities*, *clear*, *nourish* and *glow* as the word 'bebeksi pürüzsüzlük' imply all connotations of the word mentioned in the source text.

#### 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study mainly aimed at combining the two disciplines: Translation Studies, and Advertisement and Communication Studies. It was carried out to develop a checklist to measure how much women are objectified in the source text and the target text. In addition, the translators and advertisers' roles were questioned in translating verbal and nonverbal contents when they include objectifications of women. A checklist with 16 items was prepared. In literature, some similar checklists were prepared (see Lin, 2008; Hofstede, 1984; Lindner, 2004; Gofman, 1979; Jones, 1991; Kang, 1997). However, they mostly focused on body positions and beauty expressions. As this study focuses on both verbal and nonverbal objectifications, a yes/no checklist that incorporates the two benchmarks was developed. Percent Agreement of the four experts was found to be 89% and Contingency Coefficient among the experts was found to be .519. These statistical outcomes showed that the checklist could be used to assess and evaluate the objectification of women in advertisements in both source language and target languages comparatively.

The results of the study also display that women are mostly objectified in advertisements and bodies of women were exploited and exposed. These findings comply with those of (Langton, 1995; Malik, 2001; Nussbaum, 1995). In Magnum, Toyota, the beer brand Sally and Henry (The Turkish version) and Games of Sultans, the women were extremely and outrageously objectified verbally and non-verbally. The physical beauty of women was dehumanized even it was reached to the border of pornography. Especially, in Game of Sultans, the women were presented as commodities to be bought and sold. Considering that the games are mostly played by children and teenagers, it would not be a surprise that the game has a detrimental effect on the behaviour of children especially boys. It certainly has potential to lead to the spur of aggression towards women. Some studies dealt with the correlation between aggression and video games and concluded that a real relation between them really existed



(Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Scott, 1995; Ferguson, 2007; Emes, 1997). The study showed that some video games are not innocent and have the potential to spread the objectification of women society. Unfortunately, in Turkey now the violence towards women is soaring. The role of video games in it can be studied in other studies.

The findings as to Translation Studies are also significant, too. As in the source language, in the target language the translators created an integrated texts and multimodal texts (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Snell-Hornby, 2006). The translators and advertisers used linguistic and non-linguistic features of the languages. The translators and advertisers usually localized and adapted the messages of source text. They tried to make an equivalent effect of the source text on the target texts' audience. However, while doing this, they objectified women verbally as in the source texts. As in the promotion of the beer commercial, they did not hesitate to use humiliating expressions such as 'zilli' to promote and gain profit. This shows that sometimes advertisers and translators are oblivious and indifferent to the culture of the target language.

This study set off developing a checklist that helps the researchers to assess and evaluate objectification of verbal and non-verbal objectification of women in advertisement in both the source language and the target language. Five advertisements were analysed through the objectification checklist. The study shows that the checklist really works and women are mostly objectified in the advertisements in both languages. However, the results cannot be generalized for all advertisements. It is suggested here the checklist be translated into other languages and similar studies should be carried out extensively.

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