Logos’ Rebranding as a Translation Process

Evangelos Kourdis

Intericonic rebranding

Logos are perhaps the most established commercial practice when it comes to the promotion of companies’ or institutions’ brand names. They are repeated signs which are always present in evocative advertising messages. Logos are constituent elements of brand names. As Kotler (2003: 8) argues, “[a] brand is any label that carries meaning and associations”. Thus, brands become “[…] the meaning center of a community of users that become its advocates” (Thellefsen, Sørensen, Danesi and Andersen 2008: 69), and function in a purely connotative/ideological frame. Oswald (2015: 38) aptly observes that “[…] brands, not products, create discourse. Furthermore, brands, not advertising per se, create product rituals […].”

Just like all other signs, the polysemiotic signs we know as logos can also be translated. It is worth mentioning that some researchers refer to this process as re-branding (or replacement) since “[a] possible characterisation of rebranding is therefore the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them for an established brand with the intention of developing a differentiated (new) position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors” (Muzellec and Lambkin 2006: 805). It is worth mentioning that there are different degrees (Stuart and Rodríguez Cánovas 2013) and different stages of rebranding (Muzellec, Doogan and Lambkin 2003). As Muzellec, Doogan and Lambkin (2003: 34) mention “the rebranding process is composed of four stages: repositioning, renaming, redesigning, relaunching (communicating the new brand), each of which must be carefully undertaken by the organisation”. As will be proved later, the intracultural translation of the Greek logos is realised though the process of redesigning¹, a process which allows the establishment of intersemiotic relations between the initial and the new logo.

The aforementioned definition of rebranding is not different of that for translation. According to House (2009: 4), “translation is the process of

---

¹ The exploitation of design is not accidental. As Danesi (2013: 473) states, “design allows us to ‘experience’ a product before buying it”.
replacing an original text, known as the source text, with a substitute one, known as the target text”. It seems that a logo is usually translated for two main reasons: either to connote the innovation as well as the diachronic preservation and evolution of the company or institution it represents, or – and this reason applies to the majority of brand translations – to localise a foreign company in a new market (intercultural adaptation), taking into account the cultural characteristics of the target group.

This change does not take place only at the level of intericonicity, namely the translation of iconic visual signs\(^2\), but also at the level of interplasticity, of plastic visual signs such as form, colour and texture, according to Groupe μ (1992) categorisation. In this procedure, the semiotic system of a language does not always participate. This last observation allows translation scholars to speak about transplantation (Guidère 2000: 94). Furthermore, many advertisers underline the dimension of creativity, without excluding the intersemiotic character of this transmutation.

In this study, I will focus on cases of translations of logos that are used by Greek companies or institutions, namely universities, companies, banks and political parties. As we will see, usually, the new logos preserve the legacy of a strong presence and recognisable name in Greek society, semiotically connoting its modernisation through their replacement or translation.

The semiotic structure of logo

The structure of a logo as a polysemiotic sign, in which different sign systems coexist and/or are in synergy, is of special interest to designers and semioticians. Celhay (2017: 1252) stresses that “especially in the case of logos, it is likely that the visual aspect guides the interpretation of the textual content, just as much as the meaning of the textual context guides the interpretation of the visual aspect”. Thus, for Celhay, the anchorage function as described by Barthes, is not unilateral but bilateral in the case of logos. But is this phenomenon common in all type of logos? Heilbrunn (1997: 177-78) identifies three types of logos\(^3\):

---

\(^2\) Gamer (2013: 116) defines *intericonicity* as “relationships between images as well as the modi of their transformation from one into another”. For Gamer (2013: 115), this term is “[…] a general descriptor for pictorial intertextuality” and she believes that it does not seem necessary to limit the usage of this term to art/art relationships.

\(^3\) This classification is not the only one. Danesi (2008) identifies seven main kinds
a. The alphanumeric logo or logotype (for instance, IBM, 3M) which is exclusively composed of alphanumeric signs. In this sign, it is the choice of typography and colours that gives the logo its identity features and in some way, tends to iconise these alphanumeric signs so that the logo becomes an image.

b. The iconic logo or icotype which is constituted of an image (for instance, Shell). In this case we have the choice of a symbol to represent a company. There is a possibility that this symbol can be a motivated sign when their? it? bonds? with the object, that is the organisation it represents is founded upon the principle of resemblance (for instance, a telephone company that is represented by a phone). They are also not motivated signs chosen by virtue of a pure convention, thus being a product of an arbitrary convention.

c. The mixed logo made of a mixture of images and words, and is more common. This logo metaphorically borrows the elementary signs of human identity, i.e. a name and a photo. It is worth mentioning that such logos illustrate various types of relationships between linguistic and iconographic discourses (anchorage function, etc.).

In this third type of logos also belong the Greek logos under scrutiny. In my opinion, all three types are powerful signs because of their repetitiveness in different commercial environments (adverts, TV spots, brochures, car card, commercial signs, letter sheet, etc.) and their cultural and commercial recognition and connotation built very carefully by companies and institutions. The fact that the mixed logos seem to dominate the Greek and international market proves that the synergy of different semiotic systems, this fundamental semiotic notion, considerably contributes to the creation of successful brand names for companies and institutions.

The translation of logos

Logo is considered as a multifaceted notion. Danesi (2000: 40) relates logo to the “creation of an ‘image’ or ‘personality’ of a product” and he

---

4 Barthes (1982: 461) mentions that “[...] the signs composing speech exist only in so far as they are recognized, i.e., in so far as they are repeated”. Lotman (2015: 52) also highlights that “semiotics was created as a science of communication which concentrated attention on iterative texts and their structures”.

of logos: letter, portrait, descriptor, suggestive, symbolic, alpha(numeric), and geometric.
defines it as a “distinctive company insignia or trademark” (Danesi 2000: 135). Lee (2011: 778-779) mentions that:

logos are tangible representations that serve as distinct visual signatures that identify and differentiate brands, products, or organizations from others. […]. They are signs tied to facets of branding such as image, awareness, personality, and position. The term logo is sometimes used in relation to or in exchange for terms such as brand marks, logotypes, or trademarks.

The translation of logos needs careful manipulation because of the strong intertextual and intersemiotic character of source and target brands. It is not by accident that designers always pay attention to the existing logo before proposing a new one. Usually, it is a polysemiotic sign where language, colour, and graphic design are in synergy. For Valdés (2013: 307)

[…] the brand name identifies the product and is the first persuasive weapon, which requires a specific translation strategy. Translators should also pay particular attention to the slogan, which contains the main qualities in a memorable and appealing expression.

According to Li (2001: 105-106), there are four ways to translate a brand name linguistically: a) translate the syllables of the original name, b) create a meaningful name based on the pronunciation of the original, c) change to another name, totally different from the original one, and d) paraphrase, if the original name is meaningful. However, translating a linguistic sign is just one parameter in the translation of brand names. De Pedro Ricoy (2007: 263) argues that:

If […] what we translate is a message, any form of advertising material for a given product would be, in itself, a translation of the basic, underlying message of advertising (i.e., ‘want this/buy this’), whether or not it involves linguistic transfer, and a total or partial modification of images and sounds. Thus all versions of an advertisement, however different in nature, are manifestations of a generic source ‘text’, persuasive as it may be in tone, but essentially imperative in nature. Translation ceases to be reproduction, or even re-creation, and it becomes creation in its own right.

The examples that will be presented shortly are distinctive in three ways. First, the translation occurs in the same linguistic and cultural environment (in the same semiosphere), so we are dealing with intracultural
adaptation. In other words, the initial and the subsequent logos have the same recipients. The cultural parameter is very important since “[...] advertising and brand creation are intrinsically intertwined with the implicit system of cultural meanings in which they are located, having evolved into a major branch of both semiotics and marketing science” (Danesi, 2013: 464). Secondly, there is either a loss of information or added information, as occurs in interlingual translation. Lastly, in most of the examples, certain semiotic systems remain unchanged, stable, so that the examples can function intertextually. These semiotic systems are usually language and colour.

The question that immediately arises is whether this change/replacement can be considered a translation process, since the main change occurs in the brand’s iconic message. From a translation semiotics perspective, the answer is positive. Both the first (initial) brand and the second (subsequent) brand are cultural texts that can be approached in translation terms.

It is true that the notion of text creates certain confusion in the language or translation services industry as well as in advertising industry. For instance, Melby, Fields, Hague, Koby, and Lommel (2014: 396) argue that given the many processes and products that qualify as translation under a broad view, the term source text is not sufficient to describe translation. They add that “[...] the terms ‘source content’ and ‘target content’ are much more apt. Indeed, the language industry uses theses terms with increasing frequency” (Melby, Fields, Hague, Koby, and Lommel 2014: 396).

However, this problem is overcome with the semiotic literature. We all know that the concept of a text in semiotics is not limited to the language system. As Torop (2004: 59) states, “[t]ext is what we understand in culture and it is through the text that we understand something of culture”. Especially in translation semiotics, “[...] culture works in many respects as a translation mechanism, as mediation [...]” (Torop 2008: 257). In my study, I adopt Torop’s terms “prototext” and “metatext” – terms that he links to the intersemiotic environment and the translation process. Torop (2004: 63) argues that:

[...] if we start from the already created text that switches into the intersemiotic space of culture it, as a prototext, becomes a foundation for

---

5 As Chao and Lin (2017: 121) observe, “no study to our knowledge has examined the relative effectiveness of different translation approaches used by domestic companies in an emerging market to name or translate brand names for the domestic market consumers”. 
an infinite number of metatexts; it creates intertextual and other connections and loses its ontological boundaries in the end. [...] Evaluating a text from the side of reception we can, on the one hand, estimate the translatability of a text into other texts and into other sign systems by the comparison of the prototext and metatext.

It is this relationship between the prototext and metatext that I will attempt to deal with in this chapter. More precisely, through the lens of translation semiotics theory, I will examine the translation of a university logo (educational branding), a fast food restaurant logo (culinary branding), a bank logo (economical branding), and a political party logo (political branding).

The visual translation of Greek logos Educational Branding: the logo of the Hellenic Open University

The first case to be studied is that of the Hellenic Open University (HOU). The logo is the primary visual identifier of the university as a brand (O’Halloran, Wingnell, and Tan 2015: 298). We observe here that the university’s initial logo when it was founded in 1992 was a blue rhombus containing the university’s Greek initials in white: ‘ε’ for elliniko (Hellenic), ‘α’ for anoikto (open) and ‘π’ for panepistimio (university) (fig. 1). The graphics create an interesting result since: a) each letter is successively encompassed by the one preceding it, b) the last letter, the ‘π’, resembles a building with a roof and columns, the latter functioning as a mnemonic and intertextual synecdoche of universities, and c) from a broader perspective, we could say that the spatial arrangement of the letters reminds us of an ancient Greek theatre. Furthermore, blue and white are the colours of the Greek flag, which have a positive connotative effect. As O’Halloran, Wingnell and Tan (2015: 285) state, “[i]n the field of higher education, an immediately recognizable brand with highly positive associations can give a university a strategic advantage over competitors”.

In 2015, the HOU announced the “replacement” of its logo so as to ensure an “[…] aesthetic renewal that will reflect the Hellenic Open University’s modern identity and modern academic content”⁶. Lee (2011: 780) observes that “higher education institutions commonly implement

aspects such as developing new logos and other initiatives aimed at building brands”. This was a rather unusual action since the majority of universities, both Greek and foreign, strive to maintain their logo as a timeless brand representing the quality education they provide. The university’s whole name was added to the logo, in Greek and also in English, since the HOU had just introduced courses whose language of instruction was English. According to O’Halloran, Wingnell, and Tan (2015: 300), “the use of the full name rather than an acronym and the retention of the word ‘university’ reinforce a link with tradition and heritage. This is typical of the professional, scientific narrative”. This observation does not seem to apply in this case, since the HOU is less than thirty years old.

This time the colours chosen were unexpectedly different, since the blue and white was replaced with dark blue and magenta. Van Leeuwen (2011: 11) mentions that “universities [...] use colour to signal their identity” but the new choice seems ambiguous about the university’s identity. The new logo seems to represent a door that is opening, evidently for the student who is called upon to choose this university. Next to the opening door, the university’s full name is written in capital letters.

The designers’ choice has removed the intersemiosis formed in the previous logo, where the concept “Hellenic” (the linguistic sign ‘ε’ in the logo) could be intersemiotically translated with the chromatic sign (plastic visual sign) entailing the blue and white colours and connoting Greekness. Moreover, the linguistic signs of the new logo are in capitals, whose emphatic nature makes them more aggressive. This contrasts with the initial logo’s letters, which resembled lowercase letters owing to the graphics chosen.

---

7 Jakobson (2004: 139) described intersemiotic translation or transmutation as an “interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems”.

8 In a previous study (Kourdis 2017), I have claimed that intersemiotic translation is possible between the verbal and colour semiotic systems, since the latter can function as an autonomous sign even though it is a codified iconic sign.

9 As Lennex, Swetman, and Flynn (2010: 186) mention “capital characters [...] tend to be interpreted as shouting or aggressive in nature”. For Cellhay (2017: 1251), “[...] uppercase letters with a bold stencil typeface, is more likely to activate the meaning of an alert [...]”.

Figure 1: Rebranding of the logo of the Hellenic Open University

The choice to introduce a verbal message (rather than initials), and especially in capitals, which are considered more aggressive from a communicative perspective, was perhaps driven by the intention to strengthen the brand name since, as McCarthy and Mothersbaugh (2002: 671) mention, “[…] the more a brand has to say about itself, the better the brand must be”. However, a new intersemiotic translation has been introduced: the open door can be intersemiotically translated by the verbal message “open”. Nevertheless, the institution’s initial logo has been replaced entirely, something we consider to be rebranding since the visual and chromatic message has changed completely, and a verbal message has been added, which in the previous logo could only be received through a careful reading of the design. We therefore cannot claim that the visual and plastic iconic signs are repeated signs.

Culinary branding: the logo of the fast food restaurant Goody’s

Things are different where the Greek fast food chain Goody’s (fig. 2) is concerned. As Baines, Fill, and Page (2011: 279) observe, “Greece is the one country where McDonald’s does not dominate the fast food market. The Greek fast food restaurant Goody’s enjoys overwhelming support from the Greek consumer”. Three factors have contributed to this success. The first has to do with the fact that this Greek chain opened before the mass fast food chains we know so well entered the Greek market. Second, the food of Goody’s was not based much on meat; it focused on salads and light meals that fitted the Greek consumer’s Mediterranean nutritional habits. Moreover, the way the food was served (porcelain plates, metal cutlery, and free sauces) made the chain stand out among the others.
However, as the chain’s philosophy evolved, this led to a partial change in its brand name. According to the company\(^ {10}\), at Goody’s, customers now have a wide variety of flavourful burger-centred meals to choose from. Goody’s Burger House has also just presented a series of burgers made with 100% Angus beef. The market’s reaction to its new trademark is as follows:

Goody’s Burger House has started a new page in its history with a new logo designed to mark a new era for a top Greek brand. This logo defines the revitalised identity of Goody’s Burger House, while also promoting the brand’s key timeless values, such as specialising in burgers, consistently high-quality food and services, innovativeness every step of the way and above all the value of a restaurant model that has stood the test of time and appealed to the general public\(^ {11}\).

The company has kept the same name, but has changed the semiotic system of colour and of typography. Thus, while in the initial verbal message the company’s name was written in white against a red background, in the new brand it is written in red against a black background. There is also an addition in the identification that Goody’s is a burger house, provided in white writing. This procedure is considered a mode of *adaptation* by Bastin (1998: 7), who names it *expansion*, namely a procedure that makes explicit that which is implicit in the original.

It is interesting to see that the same colour and font are kept in the new logo. As regards the former, Caivano and López (2006: 14) argue that “the perception of color is faster than the perception of a symbol; inasmuch as it works as a ‘signal’ and not as ‘information’, the corporative color becomes a language”. Caivano and López go on to say that (2006: 16)


“[… ] red is the preferred color for products of massive consumption, because it is regarded as a ‘declassifier’, i.e. a color that does not contain markers of class”. As regards the font, Rowe (1982) considers script typeface to be elegant.

It is evident in the case of Goody’s that, despite the expansion, at the visual level the new logo has certain features in common with the earlier logo. The expansion via the verbal message was deemed necessary in order to convey a new information load, but the creators chose not to lose the business’s recognisability and positive connotations in the Greek market.

Economical branding: the logo of Piraeus bank

Earlier on we noted how the HOU’s adoption of blue and white in its first logo connoted Greek national identity. However, the country’s national identity can also be connoted through other colour combinations. Since blue and white were already used in Greece by other banks (e.g. the National Bank and Emporiki Bank), Piraeus Bank (fig. 3) chose to use blue and yellow for a reason. Yellow might symbolise the Greek sun\(^{12}\) and blue the Greek sea, all the more so since the company’s logo includes a trireme.

Figure 3: Rebranding of the logo of the Piraeus Bank

Caivano and López talk about companies that have changed ownership yet have kept the company name and also the chromatic spirit. Thus, “the modifications were almost imperceptible, and seemed like just a modernization of the same company” and “the design emphasized the continuity” (Caivano and López 2006: 17). This continuity is evident in the case of Piraeus Bank, since the concept of the trireme’s oars was preserved in the new trademark: the same number of oars (three) pulling in the same direction (towards the right) can be seen in both the initial and

---

\(^{12}\) Wierzbicka (1996: 315) argues that “[…] yellow is thought as ‘warm’ because it is associated with the sun [… ]”. Wierzbicka (1996: 316) continues that “for ‘yellow’, the sun offers – perhaps – one natural point of reference”. For Celhay (2017), yellow may communicates signifieds of warmth and friendliness.
the new logo. Furthermore, the logo’s font is considerably lighter, having being replaced by a finer font. According to the reputable Greek magazine +Design, this change in identity has evidently been brought about by the new reality in Greece’s overall banking system, and in particular where Piraeus Bank is concerned, by the absorption of many banks (Agricultural Bank, Millennium Bank, Bank of Cyprus, Laiki Bank and Hellenic Bank) whose brands it will have to combine with its own. The new logo was designed by MNP studio, which describes the new design as rebranding:

MNP created a new logo for Piraeus Bank, by redesigning the trireme of the previous logo. We were asked for a symbolic approach, less descriptive, yet based on the old one. The basic colors are still blue and yellow. The font remains Sans Serif though designed from scratch. We kept the 3 paddles pointing at same direction as before and we focused exclusively on them since they are the driving force of the ship. The main thought of the designing process was the fact that evolution is just like rowing. The end of a movement is always the beginning of a new one.

In terms of translation, we have an omission: the image of the ancient Greek war galley is lost and only a part of it, namely the oars, is preserved, along with the logo’s colours. At the rhetorical level, we are naturally dealing with a visual metonymy that succeeds in connoting the new while remaining very close, as a whole, to the bank’s previous logo.

**Political branding: the logo of the political party New Democracy**

Stones (2009: 69) argues that “to shift stubborn perceptions about the nature of this political party, the logo had to mark a radical departure that would get potential voters questioning the thinking behind it”. The

---

14 MNP studio (based in Athens, Greece) was created in 2003 and specializes in communication design, packaging, web design and publishing.
16 Bastin (2006: 7) defines omission as ‘the elimination or reduction of part of the text’. 
political party New Democracy (ND) was founded in 1974 by Konstantinos Karamanlis and is considered nowadays a right-wing party that promotes socio-liberal ideas\(^\text{17}\). Until 2011, the party’s logo consisted of the party’s two initials flanking a hand holding a flaming torch\(^\text{18}\) (fig. 4). The subsequent logo was a simple design with the party’s full name or initials written in light and dark blue, and one orange and one green line. The torch was lost in the new logo, but the flame remained (fig. 4). Referring to ND’s new logo, the then party leader, Antonis Samaras, stated that:

‘This is the logo of the new generation New Democracy’. [He expressed the wish that the new emblem would accompany and be the mark of many successes for Greece]. ‘A logo is the vehicle of our perceptions and the new logo, in its simplicity, holds memories of good moments and projects them into the future,’ [clearly delineating the past from the present and future]\(^\text{19}\).

In the new logo, not only did the iconic signs (torch and hand) disappear, but the codified iconic signs (colours) were enriched. While the orange colour of the flame was kept, the torch and hand were replaced by a green stroke. Moreover, the party’s initials were written in shades of blue, a colour that in Greece is connotative of the right-wing/conservative camp.

![Figure 4: Rebranding of the logo of the Political Party of New Democracy](image)

In 2016, the party’s new president, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, reportedly changed the logo of the party’s official pages on Facebook and Twitter\(^\text{20}\),

\(^\text{18}\) The “torch” is a repeating sign. It is not by accident that during the same period, in the mid-1970s, the torch was also adopted by the British Conservative Party making it part of the signifiers of its corporate identity (McNair 2003: 150).
\(^\text{20}\) http://www.topontiki.gr/article/158022/allaxe-logotypo-tis-nd-se-facebook-kai-
replacing the colourful emblem established by Antonis Samaras, with white on a blue background (fig. 4). According to the party\textsuperscript{21}, the brand and the latest logo reflect New Democracy’s values to date: transparency, a trailblazing outlook, humanity, a sense of certainty and calm strength – values that are at once modern and timeless.

In all three instances, besides the unchanging linguistic sign, an iconic sign that has remained is the flame, which appears to symbolise the party’s strength. The colour blue, which has connoted this particular political camp throughout its history, has also been kept. We could conclude that through the translation of its logo, the party has sought to renew itself while still maintaining certain timeless values. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the party’s logo has been altered from time to time to mark a new leadership that hesitates to suggest a total change or replacement, as such an act would likely suggest a rupture from the party’s history.

Conclusion

Rebranding seems to share common characteristics with the translation process. Petrilli and Ponzio (2012: 117) mention how:

\begin{quote}
the paradox of translation is determined by the fact that the text must remain the same while becoming other simply because it has been reorganized into the expressive modalities of another sign complex. The translation (target) text is at once identical and different to the translated (source) text.
\end{quote}

The same phenomenon characterises intercultural rebranding of logos under scrutiny since the new logo must at once be easily identified (recall the source text) and, as a reorganised sign (target text), must be different to it. The logo must remain the same while by means of changes becomes other.

Another common point is that:

\begin{quote}
[...] the methodology of translation studies is based on the fact that no translation is fundamentally a unique text but one of many possibilities to enter the original text. Original’s singularity is thus in contrast with translation’s plurality (Torop, 2008: 255).
\end{quote}

Torop’s remark is evident especially in the case of the rebranding of the New Democracy’s logo where many logos derived from the original one.

From the aforementioned findings, we observe that the bulk of the prototext’s information load is preserved through a powerful intersemiosis. It is worth noting that in this intersemiosis, the dominant semiotic system is colour, a system that, in my opinion, is more powerful intraculturally than interculturally. Thus, the success in logos’ translation seems to succeed through interplasticity: the preservation of plastic visual signs such as the semiotic system of colour in the new sign (logo), the codified iconic system according to Barthes (1964), despite some modifications. Failure to maintain this relationship even at the intertextual level, as in the case of the Hellenic Open University, seems to connote a rupture from the institution’s or business’s previous mode of operation, and is in turn also a conscious act, indicating an intention to build the brand name from scratch.

As all signs can be translated in the intersemiotic space, it is not an exaggeration to support that logos’ rebranding could be categorised as visual translation. It is true that the translation of polysemiotic signs, as logos are, needs a careful manipulation in the creation of the new sign. Analysing the above cases has led me to conclude that the prototext affects the metatext through consciously reproduced semiotic systems. While a new logo may connote modernised and improved services, maintaining certain fixed (stable) semiotic systems, usually non-linguistic, it also connotes the continuity of pre-existent positive connotations and values. The result of advertisers’ choice is that a logo remains the same while changing, just as translation does. It is worth mentioning that the intersemiotic elements that connect the prototext and the metatext are based on the interplasticity of signs, especially of colours, which might prove the regression of the imperialism of the semiotic system of language in commercial communication. In this process, advertisers and designers could highly benefit from translation semiotics theory.

Bibliography


Danesi, Marcel. “Semiotizing a product into a brand”. Social Semiotics, 2013. 23 (4): 464-76.


