

10. ADVERTISING AS A SITE OF LANGUAGE CONTACT

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While the study of advertising discourse is a well-established research area in applied linguistics, language contact phenomena in advertising have often been neglected. This chapter reviews work on language contact phenomena in advertising. Recent work has shifted away from a long-standing focus on borrowings and loanwords. Currently, more emphasis is being placed on multilingual discourses in advertising and the ways in which these index identities, both of the products and services with which multiple codes are associated and of the consumers who peruse them. The chapter is also concerned with the various functions of different contact languages in advertising. Languages other than English imbue a product with an ethno-cultural stereotype about the group who speak the language. By contrast, English has largely become a nonnational language and has been appropriated by advertisers in non-English-speaking countries to index a social stereotype. English has become the language of modernity, progress, and globalization. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research deriving from recent developments in marketing, namely the emergence of the global super-brand.

Advertising language has long been of interest to linguists, as is apparent from the number of textbooks in the field (e.g., Cook, 2001; Goddard, 1998; Hermerén, 1999; Myers, 1994, 1998; Vestergaard & Schrøder, 1985). These titles make a broad range of more specialized studies of specific aspects of the language of advertising accessible to a broader audience. Specific aspects that have been explored include, but are by no means limited to, formal aspects (e.g., Bruthiaux, 1996; Rush, 1998; van Niekerk, 1999); stylistics (e.g., Gieszinger, 2001; Grunig, 1990); pragmatics (e.g., Schmidt, Shimura, Wang, & Jeong, 1995; Short, & Hu, 1997; Simpson, 2001; Tanaka, 1994); text-image relationships (e.g., Forceville, 1996; Gardner & Luchtenberg, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996); and the communication of ideologies (e.g., Berger, 2000; Jhally, 1987; O'Barr, 1994). Despite the fact that the field is obviously well established, comparatively little attention has been paid to advertising language as a site of language contact, as, for instance, a perusal of the indexes of the above-mentioned textbooks indicates. However, that has started to change and is likely to change even further as marketing and advertising undergo dramatic changes. These changes are largely connected to phenomena of globalization; concomitantly, multilingualism has started to become a

major phenomenon in the language of advertising and will undoubtedly continue to expand. In this discussion, I will start out with a review of the language contact phenomena that have received most attention. I will then go on to discuss the role of English as the major international contact language in the advertising of non-English-speaking countries. Finally, I will turn to the language of brands, a recent and international development in advertising, which has as yet been largely unexplored by linguists and where there is considerable scope for future work.

From Word Lists to Discourse Studies

Although language contact phenomena in advertising have, until recently, been comparatively neglected by researchers of advertising language, borrowings and loanwords were actually among the first aspects of advertising language to receive any linguistic attention at all. These were appropriated as a purist concern early on. Wustmann (1903), for instance, lists non-German words in German advertising in his collection of *All Manner of Linguistic Stupidities*. Similarly, Pound (1913, 1951) includes Spanish loans among “the motley and audacious terms of our own day, [which] seem capricious and undignified indeed, [compared to] the formal designations created by our ancestors” (Pound, 1913, p. 40). Such loans include the Spanish ending “-o”, which is used both as a suffix and an infix in U.S. trade names such *Indestructo* or *Talk-O-Phone*. In yet another example, Pandya (1976) catalogues the ways in which advertising English in India deviates from “grammatical and acceptable English.” Due to the purist slant of much early work on language contact phenomena in advertising, descriptive linguists may have been somewhat reticent to enter a field that was seen as mainly producing—and condemning—lists of foreign terms used in advertising, particularly in its naming practices, and that did not seem to hold much theoretical interest.

Not all lists and taxonomies of borrowings and loanwords are explicitly motivated by purist concerns. However, the cataloguing effort can be regarded as the central focus of most work in the field up until the mid-1980s. Some amusing collections (e.g., Aman, 1979, 1982; Hakkarainen, 1977; Ricks, 1996) list linguistic mishaps that occurred when a trade name or slogan that was perfectly fine in its original linguistic market acquires a negative or taboo meaning in another linguistic market. Famous examples include the *Chevrolet Nova*, which was read as *no va* (“doesn’t go”) in the Spanish-speaking world, the *Toyota MR2*, where *MR2*, if read out, produces *merde* (‘excrement’) in French, or the *Mitsubishi Pajero*, with *pajero* meaning ‘wanker’ in Spanish. Even such nonpurist lists, which are more motivated by an applied linguistics concern with successful marketing, were hardly taken seriously by most linguists, or even widely read. It is not only that the subject matter seemed too ephemeral, but also that the mere cataloguing of loan forms is not seen as substantially advancing the discipline.

The move away from listing loan forms, which occurred in the late 1980s, coincided with a change in focus. Until then, loan vocabulary and, less frequently, morphology, had almost exclusively been the center of interest. In the 1980s, a shift towards discourse phenomena, particularly the identities and ideologies embraced in

multilingual advertising, occurred. Haarmann (1984a, 1984b, 1986a, 1986b, 1989) was one of the first to move beyond the focus on loan forms to discuss the functions of multilingual advertising. In his groundbreaking work on the use of a number of European languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Latin, Greek, Swedish, and Finnish) in Japanese advertising, this scholar describes the use of foreign languages in advertising as an attempt to associate the advertised product with an ethno-cultural stereotype about the speakers of a given language. No matter whether the target group can actually understand the meaning of a foreign form or not, they will be able to identify the form as belonging to a particular language. They will then transfer the ethno-cultural stereotype about the group most frequently associated with that language onto the product. In the Japanese case, Haarmann found that stereotypes typically associated with English, for instance, include “international appreciation, reliability, high quality, confidence, practical use, [and] practical life style,” while French is associated with “high elegance, refined taste, attractiveness, sophisticated life style, fascination and charm” (1989, p. 11). English was used to imbue products such as alcohol, cars, TV sets, stereos, and sport wear with these qualities. French, on the other hand, was reserved for fashion, watches, food, and perfumes.

Ads and commercials typically consist of the following elements, in differing combinations: headline, illustration (pictures and music), body copy, slogan, product name, and standing details. Like others, Haarmann (1984a, 1984b, 1986a, 1986b, 1989) found that the product name is the element of an ad where a switch into a foreign language occurs most frequently. Thus, a Tokyo fashion shop may be called “la maison de élégance, X” a women’s magazine “bonita,” a line of children’s wear “piccolo,” or a skin cream “victus.” However, slogans and other elements of an ad or commercial (such as part of the body copy) may also be in a language other than Japanese. Whereas names are taken from a range of European languages, more extended switches most frequently involve English. Examples include slogans such as “Nice day—nice smoking” or “One world of Nescafé,” or a headline such as “This is bun renji,” “This is an oven range,” where “This is” is spelled in the Roman script and “bun renji” in the katakana script (both “bun” and “renji” are established loans from English that are also used in general Japanese) (see Haarmann, 1989, p. 53ff. for further details and examples). The use of the Roman script in advertising messages has repercussions for the written language as a whole, as Roman letters are increasingly meshed with katakana, hiragana, and kanji signs (Saint-Jacques, 1987; Wienold, 1995).

The ethno-cultural stereotypes drawn upon in Japanese advertising are surprisingly similar across cultures. In a study of American car names (Piller, 1999), French names were also employed to conjure up connotations of fashion, elegance, and femininity, while Spanish was associated with freedom, adventure, and masculinity. Similarly, Kelly-Holmes (2000) points out that, in advertising in the European Union, French (outside France) is used to connote fashion, elegance, and haute cuisine, or German (outside Germany) to connote reliability, precision, and superior technology. In yet another example (Piller, 2000), German commercials were shown to use French to conjure up feminine elegance and eroticism, while

Italian is associated with good food and a positive attitude toward life. In all these case studies, examples abound where the code-switch does not only function stereotypically, but the form itself is also a stereotype. That is to say that the French, German, Spanish, or Italian forms used are often ludicrously incorrect to a speaker of these languages. Often it seems that all that is needed to turn an expression into a French one, for instance, are a few accent marks and maybe a *le* or *la*, as in the international brand name for hosiery, *L'Eggs*. Hill (1995, 1999a, 1999b) calls this phenomenon of invented foreign forms “mock language” (her context is the use of Mock Spanish in the United States). This scholar argues that expressions such as “no problemo,” “el cheapo,” or “mucho trouble” serve a dual purpose in the formation of race in the United States. On the one hand, they index the White users of these forms as cosmopolitan, authentic, and having a sense of humor, in short endowed with a desirable personality. On the other hand, they are part of a larger racist discourse that indirectly indexes Spanish speakers as the undesirable and problematic Other. Hill suggests that

Mock Spanish and African-American ‘Crossover’ constitute a ‘covert racist discourse’: that even though individual utterances may be playful and benign, the larger impact of such usages is to continually, covertly, produce the racialization of Latino and Black populations, even among people who would strongly reject more vulgar and obvious racist language. (1999b, p. 553)

Multilingualism in advertising entails mock language in most cases. Even if the form of a brand name, slogan, or fragment elsewhere in the ad is “correct” French (or whatever the language may be), the function is purely stereotypical. The use of mock language in advertising may not always be part of a racializing discourse, as it is in the examples adduced by Hill (1995, 1999a, 1999b). However, this simply do to with the fact that in many of the contexts under investigation—European languages in Japan, French automobile names in the United States, foreign languages in the European Union, languages other than German in Germany—the foreign languages that are being used are not the languages of groups that have traditionally been seen in terms of a racial Other, but rather a national Other. Consequently, they do not serve to reinforce racial boundaries, but national boundaries. Thus, language contact phenomena in advertising are now being considered as powerful (because mass-mediated) tools in the construction of social identity, be it national, racial, or class identity. Three studies that have made this point particularly strongly are described in the annotated bibliography (Bell, 1999; LaDousa, 2002; Piller, 2001).

The Status of English

Another reason why linguistics has—seemingly—paid scant attention to language contact phenomena in advertising has to do with the fact that the most influential studies of the language of advertising were conducted in English-speaking societies (see the textbooks cited at the beginning of this article). This is probably not surprising given that Madison Avenue has led marketing and advertising trends

for more than a century, and that other capitalist societies—not to mention formerly communist countries and the developing world—have consistently lagged behind the United States in their adoption of new marketing and advertising techniques. However, this focus on English advertising language has oftentimes served to obscure language contact phenomena in advertising because the use of foreign languages in American and British advertising is quantitatively and qualitatively substantially different from the use of English in non-English-speaking markets. Therefore, it is not surprising that most work on language contact phenomena in advertising has been published in relation to non-English-speaking societies, and often the language of publication was a language other than English, as well, leading to poor international reception of such work.

In the French context, for instance, concern with the influx of English loans, particularly via advertising, found an early expression in Etiemble's (1964) scathing polemic *Parlez-Vous Franglais?* France is one of the few countries that explicitly legislates the language that can be used in certain public domains, including advertising. According to the *Loi Toubon*, which came into effect in 1994, French has to be used in "anything having to do with sales, warranties, advertising, the presentation of any goods, trademarks" (Marek, 1998, p. 342). At the time of its introduction, this legislation was widely perceived as being aimed against the use of English, although the law does not actually prohibit the use of English, or any other language, but rather prescribes the use of French. This has led to a situation where English is widely used alongside French in the language of advertising, as Martin (1998, 1999) shows in her analysis of more than 4,000 French TV commercials and print ads. Indeed, some of the copywriters this researcher interviewed considered the use of English as such a powerful tool that they were willing to risk being penalized for using it.

In Germany, which can easily be regarded as the most Americanized of European countries (e.g., Herget, Kremp, & Rödel, 1995; Schlosser, 2002), the use of English in the language of advertising (and in the language of the mass media more generally) has been a research object of intense interest since 1945. Römer's (1976) dissertation, for instance, which investigates the language of print advertising as a whole, but includes a substantial section on the use of anglicisms, went through five editions by 1976. A particularly prolific author is Fink (1975, 1977, 1979, 1995, 1997), who has documented the ever-increasing use of English in German advertising since the early 1970s. Bajko (1999) found that the use of English grew disproportionately between 1990 and 1999, vis-à-vis other languages in his study of German advertising slogans that made use of a language other than German. During that period, a greater than threefold increase in the number of English attestations in the corpora was observed, both in absolute and proportional terms. In a corpus of 658 commercials broadcast in 1999, 73.4% made use of a language other than German, at least in part, and that language was English in the majority of cases (Piller, 2000).

Similarly, a study of 1,265 Greek print ads of the early 1990s (Sella, 1993) found that only 43.4% used exclusively Greek material, with the majority of

multilingual ads using combinations of Greek and English, followed by Greek and French. This situation is mirrored around the non-English-speaking world, and there is evidence of a strong and increasing influence of English in advertising in Korea (Jung, 1999), Japan (Takashi, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1992; Wilkerson, 1997), Russia (Izyumskaya, 2000), Spain (Aldea, 1987; Haensch, 1981; Pratt, 1980), and Switzerland (Cheshire & Moser, 1994), to name but a few. Indeed, Bhatia's (1992) cross-linguistic study shows that mixing with English is near-universal in advertising around the globe.

The use of English as a contact language in advertising differs from the use of other languages both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. As pointed out above, English is the most frequently used language in advertising messages in non-English-speaking countries (besides the local language, of course), as becomes obvious even to the most casual observer traveling in such a country (e.g., Butters, 2000). Even more importantly, English does not work exclusively by associating a product with an ethno-cultural stereotype, as the other languages do. It is only in a comparatively small number of cases that the use of English in advertising in non-English-speaking countries works in a way similar to the use of other languages and indicates an ethno-cultural stereotype. In continental European advertising, for example, English is occasionally used to associate British class with products such as luxury cars or chocolates. Similarly, English may also imbue a product with the cowboy spirit and the myth of the American West, as in the international campaign for Marlboro, with its slogan "Come to Marlboro Country." Another ethno-cultural stereotype that is often associated with English is the youth culture, hip hop rebellion, and street credo of the Black urban U.S. ghetto (e.g., Nike, Tommy Hilfiger). Often these are campaigns for products whose country of origin is the United Kingdom or the United States, just as some products for which French is used in international advertising actually originate in France or Switzerland, etc. However, the point of using a foreign language is more often to associate the product with the ethno-cultural stereotype about the country where the language is spoken, and whether such a relationship exists in actual fact (that is, whether the product is manufactured in/originates from that country) is of minor importance. Country of origin is particularly irrelevant in cases where English is used in advertising, as is evidenced by Vesterhus's (1991) study, which looked at marketing brochures for automobiles sold in Germany and found that the highest incidence of English loanwords occurred in the material of Japanese manufacturers.

English is thus not used to associate a product with an ethno-cultural stereotype, but with a social stereotype. Internationally, English has become a general symbol of modernity, progress, and globalization. With regard to Japan, Haarmann, for instance, found that "[t]he prestige functions of English are concentrated on such a high level that they include all features associated with social advance and modernization. In this respect the English language is assigned a role which makes it the vehicle of modernity in Japan" (1989, p. 15). Similarly, Takashi (1990b, 1992) argues that the high incidence of English elements in Japanese advertising does not index Americanization, or even Westernization, but rather indexes a modern, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan identity for the products, and,

implicitly, the consumers with which it is associated (see also Watson, 1997). These findings are mirrored in German advertising where English is portrayed as the language of a certain segment of German society, namely the young, cosmopolitan business elite, and where the implied reader of English-German ads is “not a national citizen but a transnational consumer” (Piller, 2001, p. 180). In a sense, English becomes nativized in these mixed ads. In his study of advertising messages in rural India, Bhatia (2000) refers to this mixing strategy as one of “glocalization,” that is, it combines features of globalization and localization. The exclusive use of a local language indexes local pride and patriotism; the exclusive use of English indexes globalization. However, the majority of ads in this researcher’s corpus (as in those encountered in other contexts and introduced above) freely mix English with a local language, or local languages. Advertisers in all these countries have created their own modes of and standards for using and mixing English. Rather than pitting local and cosmopolitan values against each other, this allows them to “optimize the strength and appeal of their messages” (Bhatia, 2000, p. 169)—mixing English into an advertising message in a non-English-speaking context becomes the linguistic equivalent of having one’s cake and eating it, too.

Advertising in the Age of the Super-brand and Hyper-globalization

Marketing and advertising have undergone tremendous changes in the past decade, and these changes are bound to alter the extent and nature of language contact phenomena in advertising. To begin with, advertising is becoming ever more influential. According to Klein (2001, p. 9), global advertising spending in 1998 was US\$435 billion—with US\$196.5 billion of this amount in the United States alone—and the growth in global ad spending has outpaced growth in the world economy by one-third. This increase in advertising spending has gone hand in hand with substantial changes in the ways in which products and services are marketed. The 1990s have seen a flourishing of brands that was unknown up until then—the development of all-encompassing “super-brands” whose value is not created through the product they sell or the service they provide, but rather through their symbolic value. Brands such as Nike, Virgin, or Calvin Klein are “‘conceptual value-added,’ which in effect means adding nothing but marketing” (Klein, 2001, p. 15). In the process, an international “brand pidgin” may be emerging as discourses and brands have become enmeshed to a previously unimaginable degree. “Verbal and visual references to sitcoms, movie characters, advertising slogans, and corporate logos have become the most effective tool we have to communicate across cultures—an easy and instant ‘click’” (Klein, 2001, p. 194). McDonald’s Golden Arches, for instance, are now said to be even more widely recognized as a symbol than the Christian cross (Schlosser, 2002, p. 4). The forms, functions, and uses of this international “brand pidgin” are an emergent language contact phenomenon in advertising that remains as yet largely unexplored.

Furthermore, some of these brands come with their own language, their own nomenclature, which is uniform irrespective of the linguistic context in which the brand finds itself. Starbucks, for instance, is famous for its “Euro-latte lingo” (Klein, 2001, p. 22), where “baristas” sell coffee in the sizes of “grande” or “veinte” and in

the types of “*marcado*” or “*americano*” the world over. In another example, Schlosser (2002, p. 71) claims that McDonald workers often know no more English than the items on the menu, they speak “McDonald’s English,” and the red soft drink paper cups that come on the McDonald’s food trays the world over say “Always Coca-Cola” the world over. This heavily regimented brand nomenclature and the ways in which it interacts with the languages that the “baristas” and fast food workers use, as well as those of the consumers of these products, in these internationally identical temples of consumption also await further study.

Finally, it seems that some of the major brands may actually be moving away from the exclusive use of English. At the time of writing, McDonald’s, for instance, is running an advertising campaign in Australia that features a commercial set in Italy, with the characters using a few Italian words and manifesting a heavy Italian accent in their English. Such a move away from English by major American brands has been termed “diversity marketing”:

Today the buzzword in global marketing isn’t selling America to the world, but bringing a kind of market masala to everyone in the world. In the late nineties, the pitch is less Marlboro Man, more Ricky Martin: a bilingual mix of North and South, some Latin, some R&B, all couched in global party lyrics. This ethnic-food-court approach creates a One World placelessness, a global mall in which corporations are able to sell a single product in numerous countries without triggering the cries of “Coca-Colonization.” (Klein, 2001, p. 131ff.)

Thus, at a time when the values, tastes, and industrial practices of American brands are being exported to every corner of the globe, there is a simultaneous attempt to distance these brands – symbolically—from America. One way of doing so may be to use languages other than English in their advertising. The indexing of heterogeneity through the use of multilingual advertising, particularly by U.S. brands, at a time when these very brands rely upon homogeneous consumption practices for their profits, looks set to be another intriguing area of research for linguists working with language contact phenomena in advertising.

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Bell, A. (1999). Styling the other to define the self: A study in New Zealand identity making. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 3, 523–541.

This article examines a series of TV commercials for Air New Zealand in which the Māori song *Pōkarekare Ana*, a kind of unofficial national anthem of New Zealand, is performed in a number of different contexts, by different singers, with different pronunciations. In one case,

Pōkarekare Ana is sung by Dame Kiri te Kanawa, New Zealand's internationally renowned opera singer, who is of Māori descent. In another one, it is performed by a group of Irish pub singers, in another one by an older African American man in New Orleans, and, finally, in a fourth one by a Pakeha (White New Zealander) street busker in London. The author draws on the concept of "referee design," by which the linguistic features associated with a group can be used to refer to and identify with that group, to explain the appeal of a song in a language that few New Zealanders understand and that is performed in various English accents. He argues that the performances in the ads, which target the Pakeha majority, display the "dual selves" of White New Zealanders. They index "what it is to be a New Zealander in a nascent bicultural society, a mix of two identities, of two cultures, not yet at home with either, but perhaps on the way towards being so" (p. 540).

Haarmann, H. (1989). *Symbolic values of foreign language use: From the Japanese case to a general sociolinguistic perspective*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

This volume is one of the few monographs devoted to language contact phenomena in advertising, and, to the best of my knowledge, the only one published in English. The author draws on a large corpus of Japanese TV commercials, print ads, billboards, and various other advertising genres to analyze foreign elements from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Given that Japanese society is largely monolingual, foreign elements in advertising are not used to communicate a denotational message but they serve to activate ethno-cultural stereotypes and clichés. While foreign languages such as French, German, or Spanish imbue a product with prestige via ethno-cultural stereotyping, English is found to index a social stereotype of modernization, sophistication and cosmopolitanism. The author characterizes multilingualism in advertising as "impersonal multilingualism" because it is in isolated use in the mass media while the audience is monolingual. Consequently, language contact phenomena in advertising differ categorically from traditional interference phenomena. In the final chapter the volume goes beyond the Japanese case study to explore "symbolic internationalization," mainly through English in non-English-speaking countries and through French in English-speaking countries, from a cross-linguistic perspective.

LaDousa, C. (2002). Advertising in the periphery: Languages and schools in a North Indian city. *Language in Society*, 31, 213–242.

This study focuses on written advertising (hoardings, flyers, newspaper ads) for educational services—schools and tutoring services—in Banaras, North India. Two languages are used in these documents, namely English and Hindi, and either language may appear either in the Roman or Devanagari script. The author argues that these language combinations serve to construct center versus periphery distinctions in Banaras, a context

where “medium of schooling” is a highly charged educational issue: Hindi-medium school attendance is perceived as an act of patriotism and national loyalty, while English-medium school attendance is indicative of life in other places, and promises travel and upward economic mobility. In comparing local ads with national ads that reach Banaras via regional and national newspapers, it becomes obvious that the language mixing that is omnipresent in local advertising is in itself a marker of the city’s peripheral status: “Places elsewhere are for an English unadulterated by Hindi, whereas Banaras as a whole is subordinate to such locations precisely because, in Banaras, languages and their institutions are visibly plural and in contest” (p. 238).

Piller, I. (2001). Identity constructions in multilingual advertising. *Language in Society*, 30, 153–186.

Based on a corpus of German TV commercials and print ads, this article explores the identity positions constructed for the viewers or readers of multilingual advertising. Drawing on the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, and point-of-view more generally, the subject positions created by multilingual narrators and narratees are characterized as authoritative, international, future-oriented, success-oriented, sophisticated, and fun. In order to test the acceptance of or resistance to these identity constructions outside the discourse of commercial advertising, the uses of multilingualism in non-profit and personal advertising are also explored. All these discourses valorize German-English bilingualism, and set it up as the strongest linguistic currency for the German business elite.

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