

# Efficiency of Business and Intercultural Communication: Multilingual Advertising Discourse

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## ABSTRACT

The research considers advertising as a type of discourse in the context of intercultural communication. A multilingual advertisement is treated as a product of globalisation which accelerated a shift from the product-oriented perspective to the customer-centered approach in publicity. The paper provides a historical overview of a changing nature of advertising, discusses the concept of multilingual advertising discourse and its key traits, and deals with particular cases of bilingual adverts. The results of the study demonstrate various patterns realizing a cooperative strategy applied to facilitate intercultural communication and easier companies' access to appreciative clientele. The findings support the hypothesis that combining linguistic resources interplay with visual components towards customer-friendly encoding of messages and appear advantageous for advertising effectiveness in multicultural environment.

**Keywords:** *multilingualism, advertising, discourse, intercultural communication, cooperative strategy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In modern scientific literature advertising has been discussed from a variety of angles. Academic and professional papers on business and management [1], [2] treat advertising as a subsidiary activity to a company's main trade. As a rule, the focus is on the practical usefulness of advertising for producers and sellers.

### 1.1. Related work

From a sociological perspective [3], advertising is tackled in the context of political and economic values which shape ideology and social changes. Psychology and mass media studies [4] investigate the impact of adverts on buyers, direction of consumption, consumers' attitudes and cognition, their behavioural responses to what is advertised and how it is done. Linguistic approach [5], [6] examines pragmatic effects of the language of advertising practices, the specificity of linguistic forms, their frequency and functions. Cognitive linguists [7] reveal figurative senses and vivid images realised by rapturous descriptions containing a variety of rhetorical figures, such as metaphors, metonymies, puns, hyperboles, etc. Researchers [8], discuss the persuasive power of adverts and their ability to appeal to greed, gullibility, and self-image [9, p. 144]. Multimodal and semiotic studies [10] focus primarily on ads as products of culture and show the employment of various semiotic resources to construe social and cultural environment. They also investigate encoding means used in disgusting, shocking images [11] to cause emotional tension.

Numerous works explore the relationship between advertising and multiculturalism. The scientists draw attention on linguistic resources and patterns of responses [12] in bilinguals, follow the efficiency of various types of multilingual advertising means including borrowing, code switching, heteroglossia, meaningless infringements of foreign words, linguistic and cultural fetish [13]. Special focus is given to English as a global language [14], the role it plays in forming cultural and linguistic identity through bilingual advertising in various multilingual spaces found in the English-speaking [15], [16], [17]) and non-English-speaking countries [18], [19], [20].

### 1.2. The purpose of research

The fact that multilingual advertising is common today and is targeted to attract attention of international clientele has been recognized in a number of studies. In this framework, the emphasis is mainly put on unexpectedness of foreign language elements, cognitive efforts required to process them, associations of 'sameness' or 'otherness' stimulated by multilingual adverts. Intercultural communication focus is on cultural competence, adequacy of adverts translations, and identity building. However, little attention is given to multilingual advertisement as a product of globalization which necessitated a shift from the product-oriented to human-centered approach in publicity.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the efficiency of multilingual advertising discourse in intercultural communication and business promotion.

It is argued that multilingual advertising can be used as a powerful device for a cooperative strategy applied to

enhance intercultural interactions and stimulate customers' positive response to the advertised products and services. The material of the research consisted of eighty-five bilingual advertisements employing combinations of English, its varieties (South African, New Zealand) and other languages, such as Ukrainian, Russian, German, Maori, Spanish, French. The samples were collected from credible printed and internet sources that appeared between 2000 and the present time. The collected adverts covered a wide range of topics including transportation, medical care, food and drink, beauty products, etc. The whole set was subjected to structural and semantic analyses in order to exclude the adverts with a brand name as their only element in English and the adverts with nonsensical, erroneous translations. The final set of adverts included 18 samples. The descriptive analysis was used together with comparative, and semiotic analyses in order to examine how the combining of linguistic codes works alone and interplays with visual images to create particular meanings. The data were systematised to discover visible regularities of meaning encoding.

### **1.3. Paper Structure**

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 gives a brief account of the history of advertising and its changing nature; specifies the significant role of advertising in business promotion; deals with multilingual advertising discourse, its features and importance for intercultural communication. Section 3 presents the analysis of language, visual means and messages encoded in bilingual advertisements. It also explains their customer-friendly advantages. The discussion is limited to three particular cases of bilingual adverts relying upon English and German means of expression because these samples best demonstrate the realisation of a cooperative strategy applied to facilitate intercultural communication and easier companies' access to target audience.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. From Antiquity to Current Era: the Changing Nature of Advertising**

Recent studies [21], [22] on the history of advertising have suggested that various methods of giving and obtaining publicity of events, services, and products have been employed for many centuries. In Antiquity, craftsmen and merchants in local markets made their best endeavors to display wares and eloquence to promote their skills, quality and products.

As in previous centuries, the Middle Ages did not see many changes in advertising approach. It seems that oral proclamations remained more popular and attractive than written messages due to a low level of literacy among sellers and buyers. Although it is difficult to measure

medieval literacy rate because educational standards were different than they are today, and writing skills were taught separately from reading, historical sociolinguists [23, p. 154], [24, p. iv 2] do not sound optimistic about schooling rates and literacy statistics in the Middle Ages.

The Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century arrived with changes, new manufacturing methods and technological advancements, mass printing and publishing. It soon turned advertising into a powerful and dynamic institution. No less flowery than before, during the epoch of modernity advertising employed very useful verbal means combining them with visual and other more sophisticated modesto capture buyers' attention.

In the current era, advertising has without any doubt become a valuable part of life experience, especially because the competition in mass production and selling is becoming stronger. Eliminating inefficient businesses, the constantly growing competition puts companies under pressure and requires them to be smarter, more productive and competent in order to fit the society of ambient intelligence, meet the constantly changing and almost unpredictable needs of the foreign and domestic customers. The contemporary market is globalizing. Not only is it expanding geographical space, it is constantly extending its dimensions, becoming easily accessible from homes, public or working places, and above all, modifying the relationship between buyers and sellers. What is most noticeable in today's entrepreneurship, it is an accelerating shift from the product-oriented to human-centered approach. The avalanche of competitive goods and services in the market has encouraged producers to search for new time-saving ways of reaching consumers and a blaze of publicity.

Taken together, these factors indicate that for a successful publicity of goods and services the use of customer-oriented, cooperative strategy is essential. A cooperative strategy in advertising can be understood as an attempt to attract customers by balance between cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity. With intensive intercultural communication and global media today, it may be advantageous for advertisers to use English as a global lingua franca in parallel and congruence with customers' native means of communication.

### **2.2. The Importance of Advertising to Business and Intercultural Communication**

For business, advertising has many important advantages. First of all, it is one of the ways to raise production and distribution efficiency. Acting as a mediator between a potential buyer and a product, advertising improves economy. Secondly, it demonstrates the diversity of offer and increases consumers' awareness of what is there in the market. In addition, advertising accelerates the way by which a well-made product reaches its appreciative and loyal clientele.

From intercultural communication perspective, advertising should be considered as space where interactions of

various cultures and subcultures occur. On the one hand, the epoch of globalization brought easiness of physical migration, information exchange, and consequently intensive exposure to multicultural and multilingual environment. On the other hand, there is a strong tendency to unification in many aspects of life. For instance, it is easy to recognize the similarity of products and producers in the global market. In other words, since globalization offers the world market, advertising has to appeal to the population of the whole world, and the growing importance of English as a global lingua franca is the way to do it. However, the absence of “the universal civilization” [25, p. 2] is still a reality. That is why in the quickly converging world, individuals and social groups are trying very hard to preserve their identities and express cultural, linguistic, gender, religious, etc. features that make them different from others. As Plappert [25] demonstrated, such social ambivalence is mirrored in the hybridization of advertising discourse.

### **2.3. Multilingual Advertising Discourse and its Features**

Multilingual advertising discourse can be defined as communication that occurs in a wide range of situations that employ codeswitching. The latter is mainly found in contact-induced interactions and plurilingual regions.

Codeswitching takes place when interlocutors combine their native language with foreign (or lingua franca) expressions. It is necessary to distinguish between codeswitching and codemixing processes. Codeswitching deals with combining longer units of speech, such as phrases or entire sentences, whereas codemixing is limited to insertions of smaller units, such as words or morphemes. Both codeswitching and codemixing rely upon alternative use of two, or sometimes even more, languages, language varieties, or styles.

Unlike ungrammatical mixing of language units due to hypercorrection or native language interference, codeswitching and codemixing occur to perform important functions. In advertisements, alternative use of different language elements provides expressivity, emotionality, and salience of particular concepts. It also stimulates attention of recipients and encourages interactions leading to the extension of producers' clientele.

In terms of semiotics, the combination of two or more languages can be approached as encoding hybridization. As far as in advertising codeswitching and codemixing are always intentional, carefully planned and designed ahead, they serve to produce new forms and new additional meanings. Therefore, codeswitching and codemixing lead to the formation of an additional type of encoding with new characteristics contributing into representation of a new concept.

The key traits of a multilingual advertising discourse can be described as follows:

- it is non-personal, mass, institutionalized (occurring in market situations), written and multichannel; in contrast to

personalized, oral and written interactions, advertising uses the whole range of means and modestly address various social groups and huge audiences (advertises in newspapers and magazines, TV commercials, advertises on billboards and posters, the Internet advertises);

- it is multimodal and complex — simultaneously appealing to visual and audio sensory modalities, it engages verbal means and integrates them with pictures, logos and other visual and musical ingredients to create complex messages by creolizing verbal and non-verbal images whose impact would hardly be possible to explain in isolation [26, p. 5];
- it is multifunctional — alongside with its primary promotional function, it performs many other ones, nominative, symbolic, entertaining, emotional, informative, persuasive, reminding and increasing salience, evaluative [27, p. 202], [28, p. 35];
- it is spread worldwide and intertextual [29];
- the language employed is different from natural and spontaneous speech as it is always carefully planned in advance [13]; it is creative, figurative and symbolic, stimulating connotations and hyperbolizations;
- it is linguistically polycodal — integrating two languages as two cultural codes within one text;
- in terms of amount, foreign element in the target language advertising is of two types — minimal (one or a few words) and extensive (separate blocks or whole texts) appearance [13, p. 25];
- foreign (source) language means that are involved vary in nature and functions — lexical borrowings are used to represent cultural realities and stereotypes, reflect a snobbish attitude, give “an elitist flavor”, or mystify a social concept or attitudes [13, p. 16, 23]; codeswitching produces affective influence or provides emblematic representation of some idea [13, p. 25], it also adds persuasiveness and enhances communication among bilingual speakers [30, p. 23];
- as it has been proved by experimental studies [31], codeswitching is used efficiently and interplays with the context language.

### **3. BILINGUAL ADVERTISEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE STRATEGY PATTERNS**

As mentioned above, multilingual advertisements are of many types, varying according to a number of criteria. Some ads, especially early ones, contain only a tiny amount of foreign material referring to the name of the brand. For instance, Wang [3, p. 7-8] discusses the arrival of advertisements in China and provides an illustration of the first commercial for toothpaste published in 1979 in the local newspaper *Tianjin Daily*. The advertisement was targeted at the Chinese-speaking buyers and the Chinese/English codeswitching was limited to the name of the product (*Blue Sky*). Although Wang reports on the lack of advertising sense in most of Chinese enterprises, such scope of foreign material and its emblematic value can be considered quite sufficient for the brand representation in

Chinese monolingual market in the end of the twentieth century. Taking into account the heterogeneity and significant differences between the Chinese and English writing systems, one may assume that the inclusion of a more extended piece of foreign text would have been unintelligible for the majority of buyers, hence customer-unfriendly and inefficient.

The boom of Chinese economy, growth of cities, and English-learning fever stimulated a rapid increase in bilingual advertising. After 2005, in most radio advertisements, that appear bilingually, the amount of English text prevails over that given in the native language, as it is in a TV commercial for a music show [32, p. 76-77].

The situation will be somewhat different in the multilingual and multicultural setting of Europe. Today, the English language has significantly modified the linguistic map of the world. Its functions in Europe are manifold. English is spoken as the first (native) language in the UK and Ireland, and as a second (foreign) language by bilingual Europeans. Moreover, the formation of the EU accelerated the growth of English as a European lingua franca and increased the English language competence among the population.

Due to the fact that English as a lingua franca is intelligible in native and non-native settings, English adverts are common. However, the recent research proved that the use of English does not significantly influence the image or price of the product, but it does affect the text comprehension: up to 40% of the text in English adverts was not understood correctly by the respondents from different European countries, and irrespectively of the reported level of interviewees' proficiency in English [33]. It allows the supposition that not all monolingual ads in English are favourably received by consumers.

Europe today, can witness a plethora of bilingual adverts combining English and some other European language. Let us look into one of the advertisements for the British Airways transportation services. By saying "*While other people are reading their morning paper at Heathrow können Sie die Zeitung in Hamburg lesen*" [34, p. 29], the company informs its business clients that in contrast to any other flying company, British Airways provide more early flights daily to more European destinations, particularly to England and Germany. This BA advert contains the verbal text and the BA logo.

The amount of text in English is well balanced with that in German as the narrator provides a translation from English (first and source language) and switches into German (foreign and target language) halfway in the ad. The arrangement of the advert, with respect to the amount and the direction of the text rendering, is an iconic diagram which transparently encodes the concept 'equally beneficial for different flyers'. The transparency of the encoding is achieved through the homogeneity of English and German alphabets and inclusion of the proper names *Heathrow* and *Hamburg* as cultural markers of the two destinations. The above placement of the text in English can also stimulate the symbolic reading: the priority of BA in the transportation services market. Thus, the

arrangement of the linguistic structure mirrors cognitive structures. The suggestive power of the advert is based on the two cognitive principles of iconicity: the principle of order (when the order of the elements in the linguistic structure mirrors the subjectively established order of the entities in question), and the principle of quality implying that similar concepts find similarity in encoding means. It seems that it is the diagrammatic iconicity of representation that provides easiness and transparency of the message decoding, and hence advertising efficiency.

Through the iconicity of codeswitching advertisers successfully realized the cooperative strategy of respecting their clients and encouraging them to use BA services. The well balanced amount of the native and foreign language texts provides evidence that the addresser leaves cultural references without additional explanations and assumes that customers understand them.

Another bilingual advertisement was published in the instructions for use of medical compression stockings by the German company Mediven. The key message of the advert is a complex of ideas integrating the appeal of the company to customers' trust and confidence in the first-class quality of the product and competence of the producer. As this advertisement is a creolized text, the additional meaning is created by combining the pictorial and written text component at the bottom of the advert. On the foreground there is a colourful photo of two smiling ladies. The written text is German/English codeswitching: "*ichfühlmichbesser— I feel better*".

Both the picture and the parallel translation of the expression encode the concept of 'twoness' which can be read in many different ways ('you and your health', 'you and our product', 'our product and your well-being', etc.). In this advert, the message is represented in its entirety by combination of codes: two images of humans, and codeswitching between two languages (German, the native language of the producer > English, the lingua franca). The producer's expectations concerning customers' responsiveness meet customers' expectations. The cooperative strategy is realized through the idea of 'twoness' unfolding as 'you are in the very best company; you put your trust in us, and we improve your quality of life'. From a semiotic angle, the cooperative strategy relies upon the iconic principle of quantity: more meaning requires more form of expression.

Another type of bilingual adverts include verbal means that come from different varieties of the same language. A good example is found in the advertisements created for the multicultural market of South African Republic.

Multiculturalism and multilingualism in South Africa is represented by a patchwork of languages and their varieties. Two European migrant-languages, Afrikaans and English, enjoy the status of official languages which they share with other African languages. English in South Africa appears as a highly varied system being used as the first (native) language, the second (nativized) language and a lingua franca. In contrast to other countries, where English is used as a native language by the majority of population, English in South Africa is spoken natively by a small number of people (approximately 9-10% [35]). The

geographical and social spread of English is uneven. That creates ecologically complex environment for the language development and communication among and within ethnic groups.

According to an ethnic-cultural criterion, there are several varieties of English in South Africa: WhiteSouthAfricanEnglish

(orGeneralSouthAfricanEnglish) spoken by the white population, Black English spoken by the people whose native language is one of African languages, South African Indian English spoken by the people of Indian origin, Colored English used by the population of mixed-racial descent [36]. All these varieties have their distinct features reflecting life-style, culture and historical past of speakers.

Producers who are oriented at the local market have to consider multifarious nature of English spoken in different regions to create customer-friendly publicity.

For instance, additional lexical features and coinages of Black South African English are present in the adverts in parallel with General South-African equivalents, in the adverts of ALFA Exclusive Walls, which is manufacturing and erecting precast concrete walling: “*Stop Nonsense. Precast Walls*” [37].

*Precast wall* is a General English name for “upright structures made of slabs, especially concrete, which are formed in a particular shape to become solid”. In spite of vocabulary similarities with general South African

English, Black English employs borrowings and newly coined words which certainly occupy a prominent role in the culture and identity expression. Such words tend to reflect important concepts of everyday life, patterns of behaviour, etc.: *stop-nonsense wall* is Black English coinage based on English to mean “a high precast wall which offers protection against noise and intruders” [38, p. 315].

The fact that codeswitching between two varieties of the same language is employed in advertising proves that marketers do pay attention to ethnic groups and regard them important. The cooperative strategy realized in this case is targeted at facilitating home intercultural market and easier distribution of products and services. However, the interest here goes far beyond business matters. What is more important is that manipulations with language variance in written advertising discourse are advantageous from the point of view of language and culture ecology. They enable the creation of a third hybrid space for the successful coexistence and cooperation among representatives of a hybrid culture embracing linguistic, ethnic, religions, etc. types of identity which are constantly in transition in a multilingual and multicultural environment.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study reveal the importance of advertising in intercultural communication. In the history of its development advertising underwent many changes regards its aims, means and efficiency. Global convergence in many aspects of life, competitiveness in the market are forcing producers and sellers to look for more efficient ways of attracting clientele. One of significant consequences of globalization is the strive of people for cultural and linguistic diversity, protection and preservation of their cultural identity. These and other factors appear influential in shaping advertising discourse in multicultural environment. Multilingual adverts are becoming more common as they rather prioritize seller-buyer relationship than product-buyer relationship. The results of the study demonstrated the complexity of semiotization which is necessitated and employed by multilingual advertising to encode significant concepts of contemporary life. The findings support the hypothesis that the combination of native and foreign language resources interplays with visual components towards customer-friendly encoding of messages and appears advantageous for advertising effectiveness in multicultural environment.

As an interesting genre of a written discourse, multilingual advertising is an awesome challenge for multidisciplinary studies relating to the issues of business, intercultural communication, creolized identity and globalization.

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