



Adapted or standardized copy: Is non-cultural English the answer? [☆]



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ABSTRACT

International advertisers often wonder whether to adapt their copy to each country they operate in or to globally standardize their message, especially in non-Anglophone markets. While the current business *lingua franca* is English, how easily can it be introduced into advertising without alienating consumers, and would a simpler English message work better? Does the culture of a brand also influence the impact of English use in non-Anglophone markets? This research examines the interaction between language choice and brand culture in a non-Anglophone market. Specifically, the studies review the value of Globish, a non-cultural form of English. The results suggest that using standardized English copy has relevance in non-Anglophone countries for global brands, but that Globish can also be useful for local brands seeking to upgrade their value in a local market. Globish is shown to be an interesting alternative option in adapting or standardizing advertising strategies. Managerial implications close the paper.

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1. Introduction

Globalization has not only increased the flow of goods, services, people and information, but it has also changed our communication habits. Cultures interact and brands cross borders and the link between culture and language can become harder to distinguish (Westphalen & Libaert, 2009). More people in the world speak Mandarin than any other language but English is the language of business and thus the modern *lingua franca* (Nerrière & Hon, 2009). Global advertisers often choose English as their standard copy language (Kuppens, 2010), but when it comes to local advertising communication, what language should marketers choose for their campaigns? Does using English benefit brands in non-Anglophone countries or should a brand or a country's cultural identity dominate and render the use of English useless in such countries?

The current literature proposes that both approaches to international advertising, standardization and customization, are extreme and ignore certain subtleties (Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004). Research proposes that a standardized message but not a standardized language can be effective (Levitt, 1983). Customers exhibit behaviors that are moderated by their cultural origins (Laroche, Chandon, Hui, & Tomiuk, 1998) and an adapted marketing strategy considers the cultural norms of every country where the advertising is placed. Acknowledging cultural differences

is a key success factor for international advertisers (Keegan, 1989), but this is a high cost strategy (Kotler, 2006).

Language is an important means for transmitting culture (Usunier, 1992). One of the ways that advertisers can effectively tailor their message is to propose advertisements in languages congruent with the culture. However certain languages, such as English, cross borders and represent many cultures (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). Due to the rise in popularity of the English language, numerous appealing stereotypes have been attached to this language: success, internationalism, and commerce (Hurn, 2009; Kelly-Holmes, 2005). Many advertisers use English to produce international advertising pieces (Gerristen et al., 2007); however practitioners and academics have yet to consider certain issues regarding standardized English advertising or even the use of English in advertisements aimed at non-Anglophone markets. Brands like languages can represent cultures (Thakor & Kohli, 1996). When considering brand culture, do the stereotypes associated to the English language improve attitudes toward products advertised in non-Anglophone markets? Are these attitudes more positive towards global brands when the English is complex; and are the attitudes more positive towards local brands when the English is simplified?

This paper proposes a research project that studies the role of the English language in the standardize–adapt advertising debate. The use of English with a form of simple and non-cultural English known as Globish as well as a local language in global and local brand advertising copy is contrasted. The aim of this research is to observe how impactful English is within non-Anglophone advertising contexts and to study what happens when non-cultural English is used for both local and global brands. Brand culture is a subtle but important factor in the adapt–standardize debate. By removing culture from the English language, the objective is to understand a) if the stereotypes associated to English are still present

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in Globish and thus capable of positively influencing consumer behavior and b) how brand culture is preserved using two forms of English.

2. Literature review

2.1. Language, an expression of culture

Language is at the heart of culture and communication, contributing to the development of personality and identity of individuals (Usunier, 1992). Language and culture are linked to one another: two people will not interpret the world in the same way if they do not speak the same language (Caroll, 1956; Sapir, 1929). Language also has an impact on our culture: words are often created to describe an activity related to one specific culture and thus carry the stereotypes associated with that culture (Leclerc, Schmitt, & Dubé-Rioux, 1989; Usunier, 1992). Upscale gastronomy is at the core of French culture, and certain words remain immune to translation: foie gras is never translated to fatty liver.

Historically, languages were associated with one particular culture (de Saussure, 1967). Today, language is more likely to be the result of diplomacy, history, and capitalist interests (Lysandrou & Lysandrou, 2003; Nye, 2004) and English increasingly monopolizes the language of business (Hurn, 2009). One person out of five speaks English and the proportion is rising; English is the new *lingua franca* (Ku & Zussmann, 2010). English is associated with values (e.g. modernity, neutrality, and internationalism) that positively affect non-native speakers even if this is not their primary language even though the stereotypes associated with English are not particularly related to a specific country where English is the native language (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). The trend toward Westernization suggests that the use of English in advertising material can blur cultural differences, reinforcing the power of English as the global business language (Chaffey, 2002).

2.2. English: the international advertising language?

The use of English in international advertising has been increasing (Bhatia, 1992; Gerristen et al., 2007; Piller, 2000). Melewar and Vemmerik (2004) point out that academics and practitioners have yet to fully understand the value of adapting or standardizing advertising campaigns. Advertisers may not know if creating an advertisement in English, translating an advertisement from English, creating an advertisement in the local language or including English wording with the local language conveys or retains certain cultural meanings.

The successful use of English in advertising is dependent on one critical feature: the ability of consumers to understand English. English is a complicated language to learn and somewhat elitist (Truchot, 2002), so using it instead of the local language may alienate consumers. Perhaps it is unrealistic to assume that an advertiser can create a message tailored to every culture (Schuster & Copeland, 1999), but should English be the default language? Research shows that English can be well perceived in various non-Anglophone markets. The use of correct English rather than hybrid or slang versions of English in Singapore and Malaysia leads to improved attitudes toward the advertiser (Lalwani, Lwin, & Li, 2005). The blend of English with French in French advertising has desirable consumer outcomes (Martin, 2005). Simple English slogans work well in Dutch markets (Hornikx, van Meurs, & de Boer, 2010). Koslow, Shamdasani, and Touchstone (1994) demonstrate that even in an Anglophone market, blending Spanish and English in advertising attracts Hispanic consumers in America by augmenting affect towards advertisements. If English is to be the standard for communication, it must be well executed and consider the target market, but it may also need to be a simpler standard (Beer, 1996; Mirjalisa, 2007).

2.3. Globish: the alternative

Globish is a codified, standardized and simplified form of English composed of 1500 words allowing non-native English speakers to

communicate at a conversational level of English with each other and other native speakers. Globish remains correct English with English spelling. Non-native speakers can tell the difference between Globish and English whereas native English speakers cannot. Globish limits the number of tenses used, omits analogies and idioms, and shies away from the use of humor. Sentences in Globish average about 15 words; it is a long-winded but less complex form of English. For example, rather than stating niece, Globish would propose my brother's daughter. International words are included (i.e. pizza, hotel, and restaurant) but the emphasis is placed on removing cultural references as much as possible. Globish is English without the English culture (Nerrière & Hon, 2009).

3. Conceptual framework

The English language is associated with a Western culture (Chaffey, 2002). It is appealing as a language because of the stereotypes it represents (Kelly-Holmes, 2005) and because of its wide scope (Hurn, 2009). Most advertising is produced in English and international advertisers tend to standardize or adapt from an English base advertisement (Bhatia, 1992; Gerristen et al., 2007; Piller, 2000). The choice of thinking global and acting local is often presented as an option, but advertisers may not want to perplex consumers with multiple brand campaigns that can project confusing brand messages if adapted advertising is used. Firms may tend to prefer standardization to adaptation for their advertising campaign for cost efficiency reasons (Kotler, 2006). Adapting also raises certain issues, such as brand message loss in translated copy and the possibility of alienating consumers with limited English knowledge.

Research shows that the use of English in advertising conveys prestige and advertisers can capitalize on the stereotypes associated with this language (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). English advertising copy can augment perceived advertiser value in a non-Anglophone market (Martin, 2005) and non-Anglophone consumers appreciate English advertisements (Hornikx et al., 2010). Martin (2008) explains in research conducted in France that English is often inserted in non-Anglophone print advertising as an attention-getter. The use of English in advertising is relevant in non-Anglophone markets.

H1. English language advertisements result in a) a more positive attitude towards the advertisement and b) greater willingness-to-pay (WTP) for the product than advertisements in the local language.

Other than language, advertisers also have to consider that their advertised product may have a culture. The cultural image and nature of a brand may interact with the language used in advertising copy (Martin, 2005). Brands will have a differing impact on consumers depending on the country they represent (Thakor & Kohli, 1996), the country or countries in which they are present (Thakor & Pacheco, 1997) as well as the stereotypes they are associated with (Leclerc et al., 1989). Brand origin and scope are likely to influence consumer perceptions, for example global brands are perceived as more popular since they are capable of operating outside of local borders. Brands that have a global presence and communicate in English are perceived as more successful (Hagège, 2006; Lysandrou & Lysandrou, 2003). Congruence between foreign brands and English should create more effective advertising pieces (Kelly-Holmes, 2005) and global brands are almost expected to use English in their advertising.

H2. A global brand that advertises in English will elicit more positive a) attitudes to its brand and b) brand quality perceptions compared with a local brand that advertises in English.

While global brands use English words to make reference to their international scope and cultural origins (Martin, 2005), little research examines whether local brands can also benefit from the use of English in their advertising. The use of English in non-Anglophone markets is quite popular, and can even be used by local brands, not just international

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