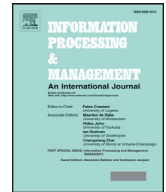


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Does the use of a foreign language influence attention and genre-specific viewing patterns for job advertisements? An eye-tracking study

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this online experiment was to find evidence for both the alleged attention-getting function of the use of L2 English in job advertisements and for a possible genre-specific viewing pattern for job advertisements. A mixed design eye-track experiment among 30 native speakers of Dutch who saw all-Dutch and mixed Dutch–English job advertisements tested whether the use of foreign language English in Dutch ads changed the viewing pattern compared to all-Dutch job advertisements. That is, it investigated whether the use of a foreign language attracted more attention (in terms of first fixation, number and duration of fixations, and returned views), and altered the genre-specific viewing pattern for job ads. Overall, no evidence for the attention-getting ability of foreign language use in jobs ads was found. On the contrary, English used in the company information seemed to have a deterring effect. Support was found for a genre-specific viewing pattern for job ads, which, however, was not altered by the use of a foreign language. Our results suggest that use of English is not necessarily a good option to attract attention. Findings for genre-specific viewing patterns suggest that makers of job ads should make the job description as attractive as possible, since this is the first element viewed. This is the first online study to investigate the effect of language choice on attention in job ads and the viewing patterns specific to this ad genre.

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1. Introduction

A job advertisement placed on the Dutch jobsite intermediar.nl in the summer of 2013 by the Dutch household goods company Brabantia included a number of English terms in a largely Dutch advertisement. The slogan accompanying the logo read ‘solid company’, the job title was ‘Senior category marketing manager’, and the job description included the following sentence: ‘Je bent verantwoordelijk voor het strategische plan voor de category Food Enjoyment.’ [You are responsible for the strategic plan for the category Food Enjoyment.] The use of English could not be explained by the international nature of the job, since the job advertised was for a position in the Netherlands and no English proficiency was required.

This job ad illustrates the common use of English words and phrases in the genre of job ads in countries where English is not the native language, such as the Netherlands. A corpus analysis of 119 job ads from a national Dutch newspaper from 2001 revealed that 39% contained one or more English words (Korzilius, van Meurs, & Hermans, 2006). Another cor-

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pus analysis in 2004 of 120 job ads placed on a Dutch job site showed that 88.5% contained at least one English word (van Meurs, Korzilius, & den Hollander, 2006a). Zenner, Speelman, and Geeraerts (2013) showed that 36.4% of 13,000 job ads from Dutch and Belgian job ad magazines published between 1970 and 2008 contained English job titles. Interviews with Dutch job ad makers indicated that, unlike completely English job ads, completely Dutch job ads with English words and phrases in them were not used to signal that the position required a good command of English (Van Meurs, 2010, pp. 150–165). These English words are used despite the fact that they have (in most cases) a good equivalent in Dutch, as Van Meurs, Korzilius, and den Hollander (2006) and Van Meurs (2010) conclude in their study on print as well as online job advertisements. One of the reasons suggested for the use of English words and phrases in this genre is that they attract more attention from foreign language readers than words in their native language (e.g. Seitz, 2008, p. 42). To our knowledge, there is no study to date that has investigated whether this is indeed the case. In this study, we used an eye-tracking experiment to investigate to what extent English words and phrases in Dutch job ads attracted more attention than equivalent native language words and phrases.

For several decades, researchers have investigated native reading processes by means of eye-tracking experiments (for an overview see Ferreira & Henderson, 1990; Rayner, 1998). A number of eye-tracking studies have been devoted to the differences between native language and foreign language reading, showing that foreign language readers are slower than native readers, in other words that reading in a foreign language requires more processing time (e.g. Fernández, 2010; Frenck-Mestre, 1997; Frenck-Mestre & Pynte, 1997). For example, Kang (2014) ran an eye-tracking experiment with nine English (native language) and nine Chinese participants reading an English text. The eye-tracking data showed that the reading processes were very similar for native and foreign language readers, except for the fact that foreign language readers were generally slower. The study showed that on average foreign language readers were 62% slower in time for each stimulus than native readers. One of the reasons suggested to explain those longer reading times is a lesser automatization of processes at the lower level of language processing (Levelt, 1989).

To our knowledge, there have been no specific eye-tracking studies on the attention drawn by the use of foreign language elements in a native language context. However, several researchers have made the claim that the use of foreign language words and phrases in the specific native language context of advertising attracts readers' attention. In the present study the concept of attention is used in the sense of "the ability to select part of the incoming stimulation for further processing" (Moray, 1969, as cited in Eysenck & Keane, 1995, p. 95). Two reasons have been suggested to explain their attention-getting ability. The first is that the foreign language is different from what the reader expects. Domzal, Hunt, and Kernan (1995), p. 100 stated "[f]oreign words stand out – they represent an incongruity relative to the language used in the rest of the advertisement – and this distinctiveness makes them noticed". This explanation links up with the finding that in general originality in advertisements attracts attention (Pieters, Warlop, & Wedel, 2002). The second reason to explain why foreign language words and phrases attract attention is related to the processing time needed for such words or phrases. As Piller (2001, p. 163) remarked, "[a] general advantage of the use of a foreign language is that it impedes automatic processing and thereby arrests the attention of recipients for a longer time span than monolingual native-language advertisements would". Thoma (2013) provides some evidence that the use of a foreign language in an ad attracts more attention than the use of the readers' native language. He carried out an eye-tracking study with 66 native German speakers looking at either six product ads in the native language of the participants (German) or their equivalent all-English foreign language product ads. The ads consisted of a simple picture (not depicting the product itself) and text. The text consisted of a fictitious pseudo word brand name (which was the same for the native and the foreign language ad), followed by the product category in either native German or foreign language English, which was the grammatical subject of the slogan in the respective language that followed on a separate line (e.g. *Finola Haartrockner sparen dir kostbare Zeit beim Föhnen mit maximaler Kraft* versus *Finola Hairdryers save you precious time with maximum power hair drying*). The results showed that there was a difference in net dwell time for the native and foreign language ads. More time was spent on the foreign language text than on the native text. In the native ads more time was spent on the picture.

While Thoma (2013) provides first insights into the ability of a foreign language to attract attention, his study was restricted to completely native or completely foreign language ads and not the more common case of code-mixed native language/foreign language ads (for a corpus analysis showing that most product ads with foreign language only have single foreign language English words or phrases, see Gerritsen et al., 2007). Moreover, Thoma (2013) only analysed net dwell time. However, measuring the attraction of attention is not restricted to net dwell time. First fixations are another important indicator of attention. Given the claim that the use of a foreign language attracts the readers' attention because it deviates from their native language, one would expect that it is the foreign language part of the ad that attracts the readers' first fixation. Equally relevant are the number of fixations and the returned views because they reflect the processing of a particular element. If an element in an ad is novel and/or requires more processing time, the reader spends more time on this element, which in turn is reflected in the number of returned views. All four measures are equally relevant to measuring attention (see Rayner, 1998; Salvucci & Goldberg, 2000; Wedel & Pieters, 2008).

The question is whether the alleged attention-getting ability of foreign-language words and phrases in advertisements overrules the attention normally drawn by the various elements of this genre. Genres are typically characterised by specific content elements, style and lay-out. Those characteristics result in viewing patterns particular to these individual genres. As Michaels (2007) put it, "attention is guided by genre information" (as cited in Clark, Ruthven, Holt, Song, & Watt, 2014). For instance, children have been shown to pay attention to different elements in narratives than in expository texts (Louwerse, McNamara, Graesser, Jeuniaux, & Yang, 2006). Different reading patterns were found for text fragments from

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