

# The Negative Effect of English in Advertising

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## Abstract

Never, like at this time, businesses, companies and individuals have felt so close in terms of economic, social, sciences. As things stand at the moment, companies are confronted not with the zonal market as could be fifty years ago, but with the whole world. In trade, English has become the communication tool for excellence. Not only. For some time there has well-established the use of advertising products in English.

But what happens when firms use the English Language in advertising in non English native speaker? May exist negative effect for firms in the case of use of English language in advertising? And what are the individuals/consumers behaviour reactions?

The aim of this paper is to try to provide an affirmative response to the question proposed and for this purpose we'll adopt a mixed method approach by of a survey and a case study method in particular.

## Introduction

In the actual era, characterized by great dynamism, the possibility of making reciprocal trade without (European Union) or with limited constraints (the world) allows consideration of commercial space as a unique: science is shared with new media, especially developed enormously in recent decades, transport allowing transfer of goods and individuals with a speed never seen before. And the list is not intended to be depleted (see also Lechner, 2009).

This is because of globalisation. It's not a new concept. Definition, advantages and disadvantages of globalization have been the topic in many debates for decades. Globalization can be defined "...as the process of becoming more international in scope, influence and application. In a business context, globalization is characterized by networks that bind countries, institutions and people in an interdependent global economy" (French et al., 2008; Ritzer, 2010; Campbell et al., 2010; Kostova and Roth, 2003).

The study of globalization generates much debates especially with the question of the very existence of globalization itself. In fact, as globalists argue that globalization exist and involve the entire globe, others, the skeptics, affirm that cannot be a globalization because of a part of the world is not interested in the phenomena (Ritzer, 2009).

The era of globalization uses and getting stronger every day thanks to the development of common language, English (Chang, 2006). English is now entering powerfully, sometimes rather subtly, in individuals live and organizations that increasingly use English language as

lingua franca. The prominent role of English language as lingua franca shapes the strategies and choices in the corporate world (Fredriksson R., Barner-Rasmussen W., Piekkari R., 2006), negotiations, meetings, e-mail, communications, and so on. The use of English language in non native speaker country can be assimilated to Americanization, defined as "... the export of products, images, technologies, practices and behaviour... (Ritzer, 2009) and, of course, the use of English.

We can think to Internet to have an idea of what is happening: many informations are in English language as well as many local web sites, sometimes proposed both in the English and local language. "... we stay at hotels like Hilton, ..., Novotels, or Sheraton, we visit Disney entertainment parks. We eat at fast food like ... McDonald's, ... we drink Coca-Cola, ... we buy products ... (as) Shiseido, ..., Philips, Sony ..." (W.F. van Raaij, 1997). This sentence demonstrates how English language pervades our daily world.

### **Discussion and Hypothesis**

Globalization of markets leads to global products, global brands and global advertising. Especially global communication imply a high level of homogenization, especially as regard languages. Businesses increasingly use English in trade relations among themselves and with other companies (Fredriksson R., Barner-Rasmussen W., Piekkari R., 2006) and, especially the professional language (jargon), is also used between multinationals and sub units of different mother tongues. In fact the strategic choices are increasingly based on knowledge to operate as on a single large market and because of that therefore the communication is conducted in English (Welch D., L. Welch and Piekkari R, 2005; Feely e Harzing, 2003; Tietze, 2004; Welch and Welch, 2008).

Fredriksson et al. (2006) argue that the prominent role of English shapes the language strategies and choices in the corporate world. Among the strategic choices more and more companies adopt the English language to enter in new markets and/or to offer their products on world markets by not translating the content into the language of the country where the product is proposed. This situation reflect the globalization (Lechner, 2009; Ritzer, 2009; Ritzer, 2010). You can say that an example of this can be seen in the advertising proposed in the English language in non English native speaking countries. Example is Coca-cola campaign in American language (W.F. van Raaij, 1997). In some cases, the strategic choice of using the English language, in particular in advertising, was seen as a way to make progress, a tool of management towards modernity (Lee J.S., 2006) and globalization.

But what happens when firms use the English language in the advertising proposed/presented in non English native speakers? Can exist negative effects for organization itself in case of use of English language in advertising and, in case of affirmative answer, what are they?

"English advertising is one research area that has received increasing attention lately (Bhatia 1992; Cheshire & Moser 1994; Cook 1992; Haarmann 1989; Martin 1999, 2002a, 2002b; Piller 2000, 2001, 2003; Takashi 1990)" (Lee J.S., 2006), in European language contexts, and not (e.g., Bhatia 1992, Jung 2001, Takashi 1990, Haarmann 1989; Lee J.S., 2006). Studies specific to English mixing in mass media, especially in advertising, have been relatively new (e.g., Bhatia 1987, 1992, 2001; Cheshire & Moser 1994; Cook 1992; Haarmann 1989; Martin 1999, 2002a, 2002b; Piller 2000, 2001, 2003; Lee J.S., 2006). Others scholars

suggest that English advertising demonstrates that “the English is everywhere and would be a way to the modern cosmopolitan success” (Piller, 2005).

But as Welch et al. (2005) argue, “the positive and negative effects of language are not always overt and obvious. Negative effects, such as distortion, blockages, and filtration, have long been recognized by cross-cultural communication researchers (see, for example, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 2003; Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002) but were not considered (Welch D., Welch L, Piekkari R., 2005) and have often been underestimated.

In many cases, as consequences or in consideration of globalization, “Management” that speaks English transfer their English in market place forgetting that most of operators and people don’t speak English and don’t understand words: this is the effect of English use that do not considers “people” but only globalization. The result is that each nationality adds new words and expressions to the language and pronounces and uses it in their own way, communications are not understood, people (and firms) refuses language and products at the same time.

This paper try to provide a contribution in that aspect of the negative effect of language strategies in particular as regard the use by firms of English language in advertising in non English countries.

The literature and studies on English language use, in fact, have focused primarily on positive aspect and how to promote (see also House, 2002) the use of English neglecting what might be called the reverse, the downside, the resistance of English language. This paper aims to provide a small contribution to help to fill a gap of literature, or at least to attract attention those dealing with communication in general and in the advertising in particular.

Globalization “impose” the use of English language and assumed knowledge of English language all over the world but consumers are not “totally globalized”. The research idea is to demonstrate that English advertisement may have a great responsibility in the failure of a “good product”.

At the same time this work represent a pilot survey forwarded to subsequent studies and other investigations. Thus, it can be intended as the first step of a subsequent studies.

### **Procedures for Collecting Data**

#### **Methodology**

The research proposed imply on the one hand the relationship between advertising and market reaction (success or failure of the product) and on the other side the study of consumers behaviour. The philosophical approach must be quantitative and qualitative at the same time (Tashakkori and Teddy, 2008).

The qualitative method, even using measuring instruments, is intended to illustrate the phenomenon studied, explain, understand the path without having to measure. Through this approach we can examine issues that quantitative research does not show, such as psycho-social, emotional. (Bryman A., Bell E., 2007; Lee, 2000; ).The qualitative research provide various tools which can include interviews structured and semi-structured, focus group, ethnography, case study and so on. This type of approach can be adopt to study consumers behaviour in relation to the advertising proposed in a English language in non native English countries. To do so we will use a illustration of a case to better understand human reactions.

The case study proposed allowed us to understand the case, to observe the mechanism and the processes of a case (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003).

But, on the other hand, the research question focusing on the effect for firms of the use of English advertising in non English native speaker.

For this part of research we have to use a quantitative approach and, among various tools provided by this type of method, we will use a survey with a structured interviews to understand the role of English advertising in the success of failure of the product. (Bryman A., Bell E., 2007).

## **Cases**

The cases examined and presented here are related to two advertising broadcast on Italian television.

The first is for an Italian product, the Glassa Ponti.

The spot presents an innovative and extremely versatile product, suggesting new habits and unusual uses of Glassa Gastronomica Ponti. The spot the story takes place in a recording television studio and testimonial offering the product using the following sentence: "Sei giovane? Sei trendy? Sei up to date? Scegli la nuova Glassa Ponti! Per rendere creativo il tuo lunch, il tuo brunch, nel tuo loft..."

The product, innovative, young, you are presented with a particular language that should be in the "vocabulary" of all, especially young people.

The second case examined concerns the Heineken beer, brand known worldwide.

Again, among the many advertising broadcast, the last in order of date, is completely in English. During spot a group of young people are making a move in a new home. One of them brings in the home a washing machine. The young men exchanged some jokes in English, and subsequently it's displayed on a screen writing, again in English language.

## **Sample and questionnaire**

We have chosen two diverse type of sample.

In the first case we used university students as respondents in our study. When studying the new product addressed to young people especially, students can be used as a good approximation of a general survey (see Harzing, 2005, Triandis et al. 2001). Respondents were final year university students following a course in business, management or a similar subject. The choose of university students has been preferred in consideration that they combine the young age and the knowledge of English language (we hope).

In the second case it is preferred to choose the sample among consumers and a particular market not to big and not to small, frequented both to young and old people.

The research has been carried out with a sample of 400 students and 430 consumers.

In design the instrument it is followed best practices such as short and simple sentences, repeating nouns instead of using pronouns wherever possible (Harzing, 2005; Schaffer and Riordan, 2003).

The questionnaire has been divided into three parts: the first set of questions asked students to assess the spot Glassa Ponti, the comprehension of the English word (in percentage) in the same spot, the purchase of the product, and the opinion as regard the spot. In this case it has been used a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

The second set of questions repeats the same questions of the first one in relations of Heineken Beer.

The third set of questions asked interviewed to assess their English skills and some questions about themselves (gender, age, job, etc.). Then, at least, English language competence (in relation to advertisements studied), was measured by asking respondent the meaning of the word "up to date" without specify that the same was utilized in the first spot.

## **Results**

An initial investigation many young people claim to "not understand" the words that are said in advertisements nor the meaning of many English words. The survey has confirmed what we suspected: as regard the first spot the product is underestimated because it is not easy to understand what it is said through advertising. Not understanding the words expressed in English, young people do not purchase the product.

In the second case the product, taking into account existing laws prohibiting the sale of beer to minors, should be purchased by adults. It is interesting to examine with much attention the results of consumers answers.

Their mean age was 45 years, and 75 percent of them had at least a high school diploma. There were 34,88 percent males and 65,12 percent females. Subjects held diverse jobs in the community, from employees to directors, managers and so on.

These are the results as regards the first spot:

only 40 percent of consumers remember the spot (42,67 percent males and 41,43 female). Among those who remember the spot it is asked to describe the comprehension. Many of them don't understand words (86,67 percent males and 78,57 percent females) and about 10percent understand all the words in the spot (13,33 percent males and 7,14 percent females). Their affirm that it is not easy to remember the spot and above all it is not exciting compared with others advertising. It is interesting the fact that about 90 percent of them don't buy the product (93,33 percent males and 85,71 percent females). The remaining 10 percent states that they have purchased the product because they knew the same before the advertising (90,90 percent males and 85,71 percent females).

As regard the second spot these are the results:

about 60 percent of consumers remember the spot (64,67 percent males and 61,43 female). Among those who remember the spot it is asked to describe the comprehension (as in the first one). Many of them don't understand words (60 percent males and 82,57 percent females) and about 15 percent understand all the words in the spot (19,33 percent males and 9,14 percent females). As in the first spot consumers state that it is not easy to remember the spot and above all it is not exciting compared with others advertising. In this case too about 60 percent of them don't buy the product (66,67 percent males and 60,71 percent females). The remaining state that they have purchased the product because they knew the same before

the advertising (73,33 percent males and 71,43 percent females). The survey has proved that consumers buy the product because they know the same not for the new advertising. For them, advertising in English is completely incomprehensible.

As illustrated above, in the end of questionnaire it is asked to respondents to assess their interest in English language in advertising and their language proficiency. Many of them have not had the opportunity to study English, or have studied it many years ago at school and now they have forgotten the same. It has resulted that 55,00 percentage of them (males and females) claimed to have sufficient knowledge of English language but, nevertheless, only 40 percent of those who declare that, know the exact meaning of the word "up to date".

Most important in this survey is the result of the interest in English language in advertising: using Likert scale, about 65 percent (66,66 males and 64,29 females) of them state English language in advertising is not interesting and, in some case, even useless.

### **Conclusion and managerial implications**

In every advertisement it is possible to identify two basic points: a form of communication and the communication process. "Communication" means the system of information and messages transmitted to the outside. "Advertising" falls into one of the many forms used to inform consumers and convince them of the quality of a product, get them to purchase, perhaps the most important form used by firms.

Advertising "... consists of every form of impersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by a well-recognized promoter, ..." (Kotler and Scott, 2008). Among various forms of communication is most important to understand the communication process, how communication takes place, and the purpose of communication that is the message. It's easy to understand how crucial the message conveyed is understood by consumers, if it is to get the appreciation of the consumer and the product itself be purchased. It is just this the task of advertising: increase sales by creating a positive business and convincing customers of the superiority of the products offered. From WWII to today's advertising has had a significant increase. Just turn on the television to find out what advertising invades every aspect of life, from food to beauty products, from drugs to advertising by social content (messages against drugs, alcohol etc.).

The trend of big brands (and others) is to resort to so-called "testimonial", characters or sports stars or entertainers, the best of the big screen (cinema), starring spot. Some companies believe that the use of testimonials in the advertising will attract consumers' attention, under advertising pressure from many companies. The testimonial presence, according to some companies, should contribute to increased product sales. It is believed that especially during phase of product launch testimonials can help to associate product image with the popular character of the moment and make it easier for consumers to remember the product and being curious, wanting to purchase.

The survey presented in this article presents the case of a spot using a testimonial known by young people, to present a product directed at young. The investigation shows that, contrary to what some companies think, in this case the presence of the testimonials did not affect the product knowledge. Why? One aspect that is often overlooked is the very content of the advertisement in the belief that testimonials alone can attract attention and increase sales.

More important than the testimonials is the message that reaches the consumer. Is it understandable? Is it clear?

One of the first and valid models to assess the response of sales of advertising was developed by Vidale and Wolfe (quoted in Kotler and Scott, 2008). In the model authors highlight how the growth rate of sales is greater the higher the response proportional to the investment sales and advertising itself. But even this model is not taken into account, in explicit terms, the effectiveness of the press, the message contained therein. The case examined has showed that the message is important and when it is understood, the advertising is almost forgotten by the consumer, who therefore does not buy the product. Many studies carried out by companies on advertising neglects the importance can have the message, the effectiveness in creative key.

The creative strategy is an essential element of a successful advertising. Creativity, however, does not mean your message incomprehensible due to a language not accessible to everyone. The English slang came powerfully in the young people lives who do not know necessarily the meaning of English words. The survey of the first case has proved that young people do not know the technical language and many of the terms used in advertising are not accessible. The company, perhaps in an attempt forced to appear behind the times, "up to date, does not take into account for this, use too many English words, a slang that is not known by many, that only creates confusion.

If, as the same Kotler and Scott (2008) argue, the message is part of the development process of product concept, we must take into account the language in which it is expressed. It must be understood by the target to which it is addressed and possibly others. Twedt (quoted in Kotler and Scott, 2008) suggests three scales evaluability of the message: desirability, exclusivity and credibility. The message must communicate something that makes the product desirable or interesting. But if the message is not understood because the language is not understandable, in this case English, which is missing here is the desirability feature that prevents the knowability and the product sale itself. "It is necessary to find expressions that can be stored and immediately turn the attention" (Kotler and Scott, 2008). When the language in which those terms are expressed is not understandable, expressions are not stored, preventing or at least limiting the sale of the product. You can refer to the rate of decline of memory (Kotler and Scott, 2008) as long as the buyer uses to forget the brand (see also Ferrari, 2006). In the cases examined we are trying to show that despite the advertising is aired for several months many young people (for the first case) and many consumers (in seconds) can not remember the advertising and can not remember the product. Those who remember the advertising claim not to have understood the meaning of the message transmitted and therefore have trouble to remember the same: not having understood, therefore do not buy the products. In others words there are too many English words difficult to understand because they are part of a jargon not common among consumers (young and old).

Not always English as a lingua franca may be useful in advertising, especially when it is presented in non native English speakers countries. In recent years we are witnessing a proliferation of advertisements in English, not translated, or translated only in part. The emblematic case of Heineken beer, amply demonstrates that consumers are buying the product not because advertising is appealing but because they knew the product beforehand. Some do not remember all the new advertising, others do not understand and do not consider either. When you use advertising in English language in non native English speakers countries should pay close attention to the target at which the product is designed, penalty the

product sales decrease. When you know the English do not have difficulty understanding the press advertising but many consumers want to age or because they have studied English long ago, do not know and do not understand what is said. Result: sales fall because you do not understand the meaning of advertising.

Di Gregorio (2009) says that you can leave in English what is obvious, simple, but distinctive, which is based on a well-known specialized language, incomprehensible things but at the same time attractive and do not affect the understanding of the message (DiGregorio, 2009). Be expressed in native language the important elements for understanding and purchase the product, specifications of the same, all that can contribute to sell it. If the product is new and in the launch phase requires a thorough description to be understood and evaluated and the communication can not occur in a language not understood by everyone. The target must be evaluated carefully when you want to use English in advertising. "Is it a target sensitive to strangers? Already exist in the target vocabulary foreign words?" (DiGregorio, 2009). Often the answer to these questions are ignored in the name of a globalization that takes for granted knowledge of the English language in all parts of the world with the only result, as in the cases examined, high-quality products are likely to remain unsold.

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